

READER'S DIGEST
Condensed
BOOKS

READER'S DIGEST

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THE READER'S DIGEST ASSOCIATION

London, Sydney and Cape Town

FIRST EDITION

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
HAZELTONSON & VINTAGE LTD., AMESBURY AND STOUGH

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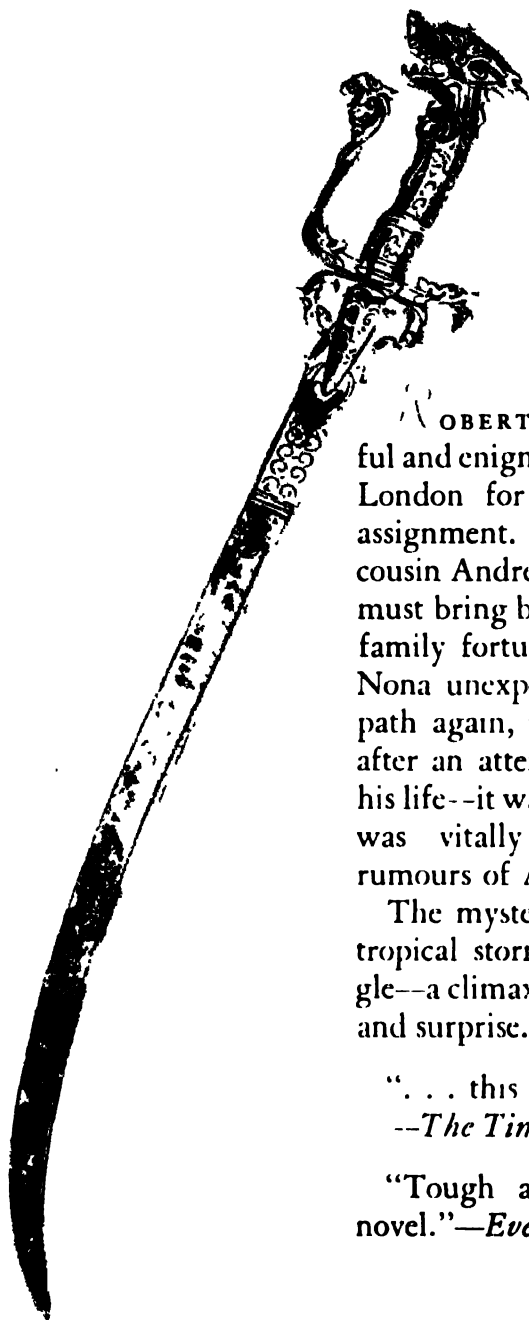
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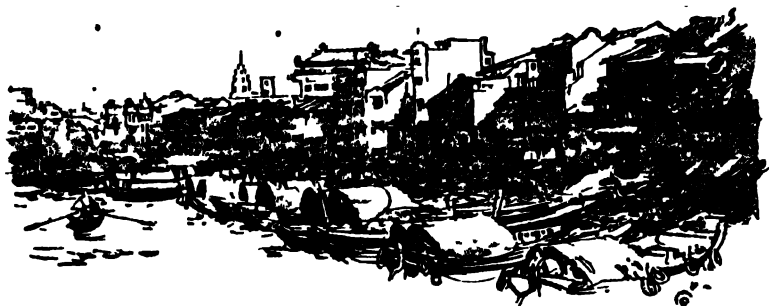
ROBERT AVERY met the beautiful and enigmatic Nona before he left London for Malaya, on a strange assignment. Was his black-sheep cousin Andrew alive or dead? Robert must bring back proof positive, for a family fortune was at stake. When Nona unexpectedly crossed Robert's path again, in Singapore--this time after an attempt had been made on his life--it was apparent that she, too, was vitally concerned with the rumours of Andrew Avery's death.

The mystery finally breaks, like a tropical storm, in the Malayan jungle--a climax of stunning excitement and surprise.

"... this impelling story."

--*The Times Literary Supplement*

"Tough and satisfying suspense novel."--*Evening Standard*



Chapter One

THE CURTAIN fell.

By then I was sick with suspense, my throat dry, my fists aching. It was the final curtain. The previous two hadn't loosed off much applause, but that hadn't worried me much. I knew that I'd avoided the inexperienced dramatist's most common fault, an exciting first act followed by two acts of steadily slackening tension. *Time Bomb* lived up to its name and exploded fifteen minutes before the final curtain. To me it had seemed terrific. What had the others thought of it?

At once I realized that things were bad.

Half the people round me in the orchestra were leaving, without even a single clap for the first curtain call. The cast took only two. Then the applause died and two cries of "Author!" sounded through the hush.

That did it.

Perhaps only twenty or thirty in the gallery booed spontaneously, but it took only a few seconds for others to join in. A sound I had never heard before in my life filled the theatre now, a great roar of execration, and it was all for me.

Without collecting my overcoat from the cloakroom, I pushed my way through an exit. Outside, I plunged my hands in my pockets and strode up St. Martin's Lane like a fugitive. I walked for more than an hour. It was very cold, and when it started to rain I went to my hotel and sat there in the dark for hours.

I was still in the chair, still in my dinner-jacket, when a page knocked at eight the next morning and handed in my mail and the half-dozen morning papers I'd ordered. Then it started all over again.

The first headline I found, over a three-inch notice in an obscure corner, declared: *Time Bomb Is A Dud. Ham handed is the only word for this unhappy misfire*, were the last words of the contemptuous notice.

They were all much the same, differing only in the manner, good or bad, characteristic of the different papers. One of them began: *A programme note told us that Mr. Robert Avery has already been freelance journalist, mountaineer, soldier and schoolmaster. He would be happier this morning, and we should have been happier last night, if he had not attempted to add dramatist to the list. "Time Bomb" was a painful ordeal for all concerned.*

Sitting through those hours in the dark I'd said good-bye to the stage. Now I decided that when I'd slept I'd get out of London in a hurry. I knew a hundred better places.

Oddly enough—as things turned out—it was Malaya I dreamed about when I climbed into bed. Malaya was one of the places that pleased me better than London. My bank account was dismally low, but if *Time Bomb* had brought in a useful sum in royalties I should soon have made my way East again. I dreamed of Malaya vaguely—no action, just a landscape and an atmosphere: thick, indolent sunshine, a heavy gold light balancing the profound green-black jungle shadows . . . great lazy black butterflies and the scent of unseen flowers and a sweet afternoon languor.

What psychiatrists might call a compensation image, I suppose. . . .

I WOKE at six in the evening, and Max Browne rang me not long afterwards.

"Robert?"

"Yes. Uncle Max?" He wasn't my uncle—he'd only married my Uncle Richard's widow—but my sister and I had called him "Uncle" for years.

"Yes. Robert, can you come round tomorrow? About this time?"

I hesitated.

"I hope you can," he went on quickly, sounding very business-like in his effort not to sound sympathetic. "It's your Aunt Julia's will again. A matter of possible action that would need the agreement of you all."

I didn't want to see Uncle Max or any of them.. "But I'm leaving London in the morning," I said.

"Won't you put it off a day and meet us all at six tomorrow? It won't be just talk. There's a development."

I saw it as a challenge. Could I face them or couldn't I? "Right, Uncle Max," I said. "I'll be there."

"Fine! Good-bye, Robert." And he rang off briskly.

When I rang Max Browne's bell in Phillimore Gardens the next evening, Sara let me in. Sara was Uncle Max's young daughter. She didn't say anything, but she went up on her toes in the hall and kissed me, for the first time in her life, and I saw that already she was something of a beauty. I'd been tied in a knot of prickly hypersensitiveness, but her gesture eased the tension and I found my entrance into the sitting-room, where the rest waited, reasonably easy.

Max poured me a glass of sherry while I murmured a general reply to the greetings of my sister, Bay, and my cousins Lovat and Bernard Avery.

The last two are twins, twenty-two, and typically Avery in looks as, indeed, am I. That means black Japanese hair, dark-shadowed blue eyes and the Avery profile. My sister, the only other Avery present, doesn't look like one, for she's ash-blond. Her husband, Dick Sullivan, was on the other side of her—an underling in a Lombard Street banking-house, a very good chap.

To get the family straight: my father had had two brothers and a sister—Aunt Julia. Uncle Matthew was a rubber planter in Malaya with one son, Andrew, and Uncle Richard, father of Lovat and Bernard, managed hotels, and my father went into the army. All three men died rather young, and Aunt Julia had survived them until four months ago.

Matthew's wife had died when her son, Andrew, was only a few months old. Aunt Julia had brought the child back to England and mothered and spoiled him as her own until he was old enough to go to his father in Malaya. She devoted her youth to him, you might say, and though she was a good-looking woman she never married until she was over forty, when she became the second wife of a rich neighbour, Clyde Hughley, who was twenty years older. In 1950 he had died, leaving her a fortune, and it was that fortune we had met once again to discuss in Uncle Max's sitting-room.

I said that Aunt Julia spoiled the boy Andrew, and in the way of so many spoiled children he turned into a pretty unsatisfactory adult. In the end even Aunt Julia had to admit it, and several months before she died she let the rest of us know that she had disinherited her wild black sheep, and broken off all communication with him. We—Bay and myself, Lovat and Bernard and Sara—were to be her heirs.

But we hadn't figured at all in her previous will, chiefly, I think, as a result of our parents' criticism of the way she had spoiled Andrew; and Uncle Max had cautioned us against counting overmuch on ever handling any of old Clyde Hughley's money: "If Andrew were to show up in England, or even if there were a letter with a Singapore or North Borneo stamp for her, I think you could say good-bye to every penny."

Sound advice it proved, for when Aunt Julia died three months later we soon learned that she'd made a new will on her death-bed. The entire income from the trust she'd turned her fortune into was to go to her nephew Andrew Eldon Avery for life. On his death, or if his death had already taken place, it was to be divided equally, as before, among her niece, her three other nephews and Sara Browne.

Her lawyers had tried unsuccessfully to get in touch with Andrew, and we'd finally appointed an investigator of our own. For a month now a fellow called Smith, an old South-East Asia hand recommended to Uncle Max at his club, had been making inquiries. A waster like Andrew would surely have come forward to claim a fortune. With every month that went by without news of him, the possibility of his death came nearer to probability, and the corresponding probability grew stronger that the five of us could look forward to a comfortable income for the rest of our lives. But when?

Uncle Max was going over it again now. "The lawyers tell me there's very little hope as things are of getting a court to grant a legal presumption of Andrew's death for six years. Seven years from the last date on which he was known to be alive is the normal waiting period, and it seems we can't hustle it without strong evidence."

My brother-in-law stubbed out a half-smoked cigarette. "So we just have to go on hoping for something from Smith."

"No." Uncle Max turned over his papers. "Yesterday I received three letters—one from Smith and two about Smith."

The development. Uncle Max paused and sipped his sherry.

"Smith wrote from Singapore to say that we could expect a final report from him within a week. He was only awaiting an Indonesian visa, he wrote, to close his investigation."

That sounded encouraging. Uncle Max laid down his folder and went on, "Now you know that I've been regretting the choice of Smith as our investigator and I'd written in confidence to my partner's brother-in-law, who, I discovered only ten days ago, is a broker in Singapore. Two letters came from him yesterday—one a reply to mine, saying that Smith was a well-known drunk and drifter who had served a sentence for something very questionable in Sarawak just after the war. The other told me that he'd just seen in the morning paper that Smith had been found dead of a heart attack on a road outside Singapore last Sunday."

Back where we started.

"That is the development," Uncle Max said precisely. "Now we come to the proposed action. We must start again with another investigator, of course. But having bought one pig in a poke I take it we don't want to buy another, nor do we want more delay. And in fact there is no need for either, because we can approach an admirably qualified investigator here and now."

His eyes swept slowly round the ring of us. "My proposal is that Robert should be our representative, leaving for the East as soon as he is free to go and staying there until he has found Andrew, alive or dead."

Bernard said at once, "It's a great idea."

"It's wonderful!" That was Sara.

Bay said, "Yes, Robert, do go."

I drank some sherry. My throat was dry—I suppose it was the sudden excitement, seeing the picture of a future fill the grey blank into which I had been staring ever since those ugly cries broke out in the gallery.

Max Browne was very pleased with himself. "You're the obvious man for the job, Robert. For one thing, you're the only one of us who's ever met Andrew since he was a small boy."

"Steady, Uncle Max," I protested. "He wasn't such a big boy when I stayed those two months with Uncle Matthew in Malaya. Andrew was only sixteen. And I was just ten."

"Yes, yes, a small point, I agree. But there are others. You know something of that part of the world."

"Malaya, yes," I admitted. "Those couple of months when I was a

kid, and eighteen more soldiering up during the Emergency. But Andrew lost his job there in 'fifty-one and went to North Borneo. I've never been there."

"You *liked* the East," he persisted. "I'm sure I've heard you say you wanted to go back there one day."

I nodded. They were all looking at me as if it was settled, as if two problems had happily been solved at one stroke. They were right, of course: the idea was a perfect solution for my own problem. A change of scene, a challenge, an escape from the scene of failure—and possibly a fortune at the end of it. What could I do but accept?

Out of his folder Uncle Max had taken a small folded paper which he passed to me—a cheque. "Pay Robert Avery one thousand pounds."

"Get as far as you can on that, Robert, and let us know if you need any more. We can draw up a balance-sheet later."

I looked down at my shoes and folded the cheque again. I said, "I'll try it, Uncle Max. It's very good of you."

I OPENED my investigation a good deal earlier than any of them could have expected. Next morning, in fact.

When my call to the B.B.C. had been switched through to the casting desk of the TV Drama Department I asked, "Can you let me have the address of Miss Nona Nicolas?"

I was given her agent's number, and rang it immediately. A moment later I had Nona Nicolas's address and phone number, and I was ringing that.

"Yes?"

"Can I speak to Miss Nicolas?"

"Frvde not." The cleaning woman, it seemed. "She's in 'ospital."

"Oh. D'you know if she can see visitors?"

"Oh, yes. There's nothing the matter with 'er."

"Then——?"

"She ain't ill, I mean. It's one of those rest 'ospitals for people who worry—not a real mental 'ome. Stagford 'ouse, not far from Lewes."

I thanked her and rang off.

There hadn't been any point in mentioning Nona Nicolas to Uncle Max or any of the others, because it was just a hunch, this decision to see her again. I'd met her at a party in Hampstead, crowded with lesser

theatrical people, shortly before Aunt Julia died, and for someone so quiet and reserved she had stayed in my memory with a curious persistence.

I had been introduced to an alarming woman with a parrot's voice and a genteel accent who'd exclaimed, as soon as she heard my name, "But have you met your beautiful namesake?" And she darted away to grab the elbow of a girl who'd been standing with her back to me. "Nona, look at this namesake of yours I've found. *Robert* Avery, he's called. Don't you think he's quite noteworthy?"

The girl looked at the woman for two seconds as if convinced she was mad and then turned to smile briefly at me. "How d'you do, Mr. Avery. I'm Nona Nicolas."

The parrot woman first registered dismay and then an exaggerated discretion, melting away into the crowd as the girl and I began a fairly commonplace conversation. We leaned close to hear each other above the battlefield din that fifty people's voices make once a party has got under way. I didn't think her beautiful that day, but she was good to look at—small and quiet, with hair and eyes more vivid, somehow, than the rest of her. Really golden hair and golden eyes with almost black lashes and brows. Her quiet was not completely natural, I felt—a sort of restraint. But her reserve impressed me. Nothing of note happened until somebody pushed an elaborately heaped tray between us.

Surprised, the girl exclaimed, "What wonderful *kechi ma'kan!*"

Now that is the way English *mems* and their Chinese cooks in Malaya refer to the canapés and miniature oddments handed round to eat with cocktails. So, "You've been in Malaya," I said.

She chose a cream-smothered prawn in a pastry nest and said, "I was there, yes. You too?"

"Just for twenty months," I said.

She was eating the prawn while her eyes wandered about the room as if I'd bored her. I recalled the odd incident of our introduction, and I said, "A cousin of mine was in Malaya until a few years ago. Andrew Avery. I wonder if you ever came across him."

It was because of her strange reception of that oblique question that I was going down to Lewes to see her again. Her eyes swept up to meet mine in a short stare of innocence that—don't ask me why—struck me instantly as false. "No," she said shortly. "Is he like you?"

"I hope not," I said. "He's rather a self-appointed outlaw."

She looked away again. "Will you excuse me, Mr. Avery? I came to this party on purpose to meet that man talking to our hostess. He's a TV producer." And she was off before I could answer. Her eyes hadn't once met mine after that one straight stare of denial. The impression I was left with was that for an actress she was a poor liar.

A month later I'd seen Nona Nicolas in a TV play. Though the play itself had been pretty unconvincing she had radiated a blend of sympathy and tension that I'd found strangely memorable. Somehow this left me unprepared for her easy self-possession when I met her at Stagford House.

The place was an incongruous setting for a neurotics' retreat. A rich and extrovert Victorian family had so obviously built it and led their purposeful lives in it. I walked up a winding drive between monstrous hedges of rhododendron, broken here and there to reveal several people strolling across the snowdrop-and-crocus-decorated lawns, looking every bit as stable and responsible as I did myself.

A sort of parlourmaid who looked as if she might have a university degree directed me to a sun lounge, and I saw Nona Nicolas in a corner, sitting at a small table with a cup of coffee and an unopened book. When the parlourmaid announced me she showed little surprise and invited me with a gesture to join her.

"I hope you don't mind my calling," I began—without much assurance, because I suspected that she probably would mind as soon as she learned the object of my visit.

She smiled and said, "Please sit down. Would you like a cup of coffee? Rather good coffee?"

I accepted, and she gave the order. My main impression of her now was still one of reserve, of vitality held in check. A natural eagerness and confidence were betrayed through gaps in a curtain of caution and apprehension—that's how it looked to me.

Her bright-gold eyes were brave. The dark-red mouth was not so resolutely controlled. She was pale, I suspected, under her make-up. I liked her dress, a thin woollen one, honey-coloured; and now I remembered her dress at the Hampstead party: that had been perfect too.

Waiting for my coffee, I ventured a comment. "When they said you'd gone into hospital I was afraid you were ill. I'm glad you're only tired."

"It's just that I sleep so little," she said. "I'm not going to stay here." Then she went on, "You haven't told me yet why you've come." She leaned back and crossed her ankles. Her legs were wonderful.

"I'm in a jam," I said, "and I hope perhaps you can help me out."

She said nothing, so I had to start explaining. "There's some money," I said, "a lot of money, and I have to find out whom it belongs to. Either it belongs to me and four others, or else it belongs to a cousin of mine. Andrew Avery."

Her eyes met mine squarely. "But how d'you imagine I could help you?"

"There was a lady at that party who seemed to think your name was Avery too, and I wondered——"

She cut in. "But Rhoda Munro is completely gaga. Didn't you know?"

"But why should she imagine your name was Avery?"

"It's no good asking me. She could just as easily have said Gandhi." Her fine eyes held mine aggressively, but my guess was she was lying.

"Did you know Andrew Avery had been left a quarter of a million?" I asked her, and added, "Pounds?"

She blinked and set down her cup. "You asked me before about this Andrew Avery. I told you then I didn't know him. What *is* this?" She'd meant to sound cold and sharp, but the tone slipped and I began to feel like a bully.

Leaning forward impulsively, I put my two open hands flat on the table in a gesture of candour. "I've got to find Andrew Avery. I'm going to find him or find out what happened to him."

She had turned away, her fingers playing with a gold bracelet round her left wrist. "You mean, his aunt's quarter of a million is going begging because he can't be found to sign a receipt?"

Though I'd mentioned nothing about the money coming from any aunt I didn't point that out to her because now I was hating myself. There was a change in her—almost as if a different presence had taken her place in the chair opposite me. She was shrinking slightly from me with her back to the wall. I was aware of pity, which is something to which I've always been readily susceptible—I almost said "vulnerable." I've found it the most disabling of emotions and many a time wished I'd been born with a thicker skin.

I leaned back and found myself saying, "I didn't know Andrew Avery either—at least, only for a couple of months when I was a kid."

"Did you like him?" Her question was unexpected. I don't believe she'd expected it herself.

"Yes, I liked him," I told her. "I hated him, too."

"Why? Did he bully you?"

"Sometimes. And sometimes he was so completely the brother I'd never had that I almost worshipped him."

She said, "I expect you exaggerated. I expect you were an imaginative little boy."

"Imaginative?"

"Don't you think all dramatists have to be imaginative little boys first?" she asked.

I looked down at my coffee cup. "I'm no dramatist," I said.

"Not a very good one yet," she said. "But it wasn't as bad as they made out."

"You saw it?" I was blinking at her in amazement.

She nodded. "I saw you, too. I was three rows behind you. When those beasts started booing I tried to speak to you, but you ran away too fast."

I was silent with the small shock. She had remembered me too after that five-minute meeting. She had gone to see my play, and she was the first to offer me sympathy in words.

There was a silence for a while. I finished my coffee. The sun had vanished and most of the patients who'd been walking round the crocus-starred lawns under the bare lime branches were returning to the house. I let the silence run for half a minute longer and then I said, "Are you going to help me?"

She looked at me when she heard that, but didn't answer.

"I'm flying to Singapore on Tuesday, to find out what happened to Andrew Avery. I've got practically no clues to start on. You could help me." By then I was sure of it.

In a strangely different voice she said, "Yes, I'll help you. Don't go."

I stared.

She rose from her chair and said it again. "Don't go. That's the best help I can give you. A warning."

I had got up too, and followed her now as she walked towards the

entrance hall. "I mean it, she said as we reached the front door. She was breathing with difficulty, one hand in a tight fist between her breasts. "Don't go."

She sounded real, never mind how melodramatic the lines were, just as she had in the bad TV show I had seen her in. She really was afraid—afraid of what, I couldn't imagine, but I could sense the surf of nightmare that was sucking her under.

It wasn't for nothing that she had come to this place.

"If you tell me what you know perhaps I won't need to go," I suggested.

"But you won't listen to me."

"If you talk I'll listen."

A youngish man with grey hair was watching us from the foot of the main staircase. In that place you couldn't tell doctors from patients, but I thought he was probably a doctor.

"You don't believe me." She sighed.

"How can I?" I protested. "You haven't told me anything."

"I can't," she said with whispered intensity. "I can't tell you anything. Only that you mustn't go." Seeing my face, she shut her eyes and shook her head. "Never mind what you're thinking. Just try to believe I want to help."

I said, "I didn't want



to distress you, honestly. I can't see why you won't trust me. I'm sorry I came."

Suddenly my hand was caught between hers. I wasn't warm, but her hands were icy.

"Good-bye, then," she said. "Remember I tried to help you."

Before I could think how to answer that one she'd turned her back on me and swept out of sight up the wide steps. Every time I remembered Nona Nicola's in the next few days, and that was often, I felt the bleak helplessness of pity. I had never imagined such loneliness as I'd seen in her eyes and heard in her voice that afternoon.

Chapter Two

ONE OF the reasons I went to the Sultan Mustafa Hotel, for the few days I meant to spend in Singapore was that there was no knowing how long Uncle Max's thousand pounds might have to last, and the Sultan Mustafa was cheap. The other reason was that I liked the place. I had stayed one of my last weeks in Malaya there, in 1912, when I was almost broke, waiting for my deferred troopship passage home.

The owners were Chinese, of course, the manager a Portuguese Eurasian from Timor, the boys a mixed bunch of Malays and Hailams, the hall porter a starvation-thin Shanghai Chinese I didn't like, and the night porter a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound Sikh.

It wasn't a very good hotel. The food was good because the cook was Cantonese, but the beds were short, the room lighting fluorescent and ghastly, the neighbourhood incredibly noisy for about twenty hours of the twenty-four.

"Any mail for me?" I asked the gaunt hall porter when I'd filled in the visitor's form.

"No mail," he said with his unreliable smirk.

Five days before my arrival the following cabled advertisement had appeared in the Singapore newspapers:

ANDREW ELDON AVERY. Anyone having knowledge of the whereabouts of Andrew Eldon Avery during the past twelve months is asked to write to Robert Avery at the Sultan Mustafa Hotel. Reward for useful information.

"There ought to be some letters for me," I said.

He shook his head. "No letters. Solly."

Bad start. .

"But pelaps you telephone this numba," he added slyly. But he said everything slyly; it was his way of speaking.

I took the slip of paper he handed me. It had my name on it and a Singapore phone number. "Who gave you this?" I asked.

"Somebody telephone this message. Two-thlee days agô."

In my cubicle of a room I switched on the fan and sat on the hard, short bed. It was incredibly bare—the room—nowhere to put anything, no wardrobe or drawers, just three pgs. The only comfort provided, apart from the bed, was a pair of wooden sandals for use in the bathroom. They would have fitted me at the age of thirteen.

But I liked it.

A bare brown foot kicked open the door, and a bottle of Tiger beer came in, backed by a dazzling grin. This was Jaafar, whom I remembered from five years back, looking exactly the same, good-natured and indolent, gossipy and amoral, permanently broke and never down-hearted. He remembered me too.

We exchanged greetings. It was good to hear Malay spoken again and to speak the half-forgotten phrases once more. I lay on my bed and drank the Tiger. Jaafar leaned against the door, rubbing one naked foot against the other, filling me in on the local gossip. Malay was coming back to me; there wasn't a sentence I didn't get.

Had I got a job in Singapore now? he asked when his news was exhausted.

"Not a job, looking for news," I replied.

A hoarse, furious shout of "Jaafar!" roused only a flawless grin. It was twice repeated before the boy turned, hooked the door open with his bare toe, and left with indolent grace.

After a shower and a change I went down to the phone in a cubby-hole at one end of the deserted bar and rang the number on the slip of paper the hall porter had given me. The answer came in English.

"Who is that?"—a strangely intimate voice, a fat, furry voice, gently insinuating.

I said, "Robert Avery here. I've been given a message to ring your number."

"You inserted an advertisement in the *Straits Times*, Mr. Avery"—an over-correct accent and diction, the words breathed rather than spoken.

"Yes."

"Then I think we should meet, because I have some news for you." The slow, deep voice seemed very sure of itself.

"Good."

"Then shall I come and see you, Mr. Avery?"

I was snob enough not to favour entertaining strangers at the Sultan Mustafa. "Couldn't I come and see you?" I asked.

"You'll be welcome. When would you like to come? Tomorrow morning at eleven?"

"Fine."

"I shall expect you. Jerampang Road, Number 61."

"Good." On the point of ringing off, I said quickly, "I don't know your name yet."

The warm, soft voice answered, "My name is Marcos Aragon. I shall expect you at eleven o'clock. Good-bye."

I was left with a blank evening to fill. So I left the hotel and jostled my way up to the Esplanade without any idea of where I was going. After the choking winter grey of England the colour blaze of equatorial land, sea and sky was an endless exhilaration. A lean, spectacled Punjabi got out of a small yellow-top taxi, and I took his place in it, directing the driver on impulse to Koh Han Seng Street. Not that I knew where Koh Han Seng Street was, but Smith had lived at Number 6.

It took fifteen minutes to get there, and I was lost after the first five or six. A sad little street it was when we turned up it at last, neither quite in nor quite out of slumdom. Number 6 stood back from the rutted road in a small grove of fruit trees, most of them banana palms with their vast leaves torn to tatters by a recent storm. A double curving flight of stone steps, rather grand, led up to a narrow, mean veranda where a European who hadn't shaved for two or three days was sleeping in crumpled blue pyjamas on a long rattan chair.

He woke up as I reached the top step. "Who's that? Who's that? Who's that?" He struggled up, puffing and blinking.

I said to him, "Please don't get up. I wonder if you knew Mr. Smith." I was making it up as I went along, and the dialogue was pretty stilted.

He glared. "Knew Mr. Smith?"

"He lived here, didn't he?"

"Lived here? Of course he lived here." He was waking gradually, a sad wreck of what had probably been a fine-looking man before he'd lost his figure, most of his hair and one or two of his teeth. When I asked again if he'd known Smith he gave me to understand that he and Smith had been inseparable for years.

"Then perhaps you knew he was making some investigations on behalf of my family," I said.

He was wide awake then. "If he'd let that alone he'd've been alive today," he declared with an unfriendly glance from gin-flushed eyes.

"You don't mean that he died as a result of his investigations?"

"He died as a result of his asthma. But if he'd stayed at home in bed the asthma wouldn't have done him no more harm than usual. He had to rest, see, whenever the asthma got him."

I said, "My name's Robert Avery. My family were hoping, from Smith's last letter, that he'd found some information for us."

"Porter's mine," he said shortly. "Yes, Smithy'd got whatever it was he'd been after. Never tasted a drop them last three days. 'No, Jeff,' he'd say to me, 'a clear head's what I need now. Wait till I've popped over to Indonesia and got them documents and air-mailed 'em to London and we can celebrate for a whole bloody week.' That's what he said. He had hopes of five thousand dollars from your people."

Five thousand Malayan dollars was the sum Uncle Max had agreed to pay Smith, on top of his retainer, for legally attested confirmation of Andrew's death or for being put in touch with Andrew if he should still be living. ~~No longer~~ ^{Not hoping} for much, I asked, "Do you know what he'd discovered?"

Porter's bare, blunt foot aimed a kick towards a vagrant hen, which squawked in dusty retreat. "You didn't know Smithy. I did, so I never asked. 'Don't ask me, Jeff,' he said,"—so perhaps he had asked, after all!—"because the whole thing's confidential." That was enough for me. The Saturday night he died he sat in that chair, drinking soda water, with the asthma giving him hell once or twice. 'Jeff, I've bust it wide open,' he said to me. 'Right under my nose all the time.' I wanted to stop him going out. 'No, Jeff,' he said. 'I got just a small detail to fix. Be back by ten.' And by ten he was dead in a monsoon drain off the Bukit Timah Road."

Porter turned to spit over the veranda rail.

"The doctor told him his heart wouldn't stand up to action while the asthma was on him. It was Dr. da Silva that found out Smithy's allergies—spices, specially pepper and cinnamon. Poor old Smithy, a whiff of pepper or even a sausage that you or I'd never notice was peppery, and he'd be wheezing and choking and tears streaming from his eyes. Funny thing, you know, I sat in that room most of the night with him, after they brought the body in, and damn me if I didn't start sneezing and drop a tear or two, as if there was pepper haunting his death-bed."

For a while I stood thinking and then I asked, "Where does Dr. da Silva live?"

"Fourth house round the corner," he muttered.

A taxi carried me out of Koh Han Seng Street and to Dr. da Silva's. He was a thin, middle-aged Eurasian, and I liked him on sight. What his technical qualifications might be I had no idea, but conscientiousness and integrity shone unmistakably out of his mild eyes and alert, attentive face.

I told him that I was an author, that I wanted to consult him about the medical possibility of a plot element suggested to me by Smith's death: It was known that Smith had a violent allergy to pepper. Suppose an enemy had forced him to inhale a large quantity of it, and then, with Smith in a state of asthmatic collapse, proceeded to suffocate him. At that stage it would take no more than a couple of minutes. The body would show no signs of violence, and would be in the same state as if he'd died as a normal consequence of a severe asthmatic attack.

Dr. da Silva agreed cautiously that Smith could have been murdered in the manner I suggested.

Then he paused and his tone changed. "I think you should be frank with me, Mr. Avery. Because if there is anything more behind these questions of yours than a—a storyteller's curiosity, it is a very serious matter."

So I had to make up my mind then and there in the shabby room with the creaking overhead fan stirring slow eddies of coolness round us; because this was a man I was not prepared to deceive.

Meeting his mild, alert eyes, I said slowly, "You mean, have I actual grounds for suspicion?" I waited for his nod and then I said, "No, Doctor. None."

BEFORE I set out to see Marcos Aragon next morning I went down to the water-front to apply for a visa at the Indonesian Consulate General in the K.P.M. Building. Smith had been going to Indonesia, so I'd be going too.

As I was clumping down the dark stairway again, a woman who was climbing the steps below me whirled round suddenly and ran back down towards the street. She was almost out of sight before a signal flashed through my consciousness. I blinked after the slim fugitive figure as the high heels tip-tapped headlong down the steps, the thin cream skirt billowing.

By the time I reached the street door I was pretty sure. She was scrambling into a taxi across the road, the wide brim of her straw hat hiding her face, but now I was surer still. The taxi was moving before the door slammed. It slammed on her handbag and flew open again, and I saw something falling into the road. Then the door slammed again and the taxi was out of sight.

When I picked the newspaper and handkerchief out of the road I believe I recognized the scent, a simple garden fragrance. And anyway there was the double N embroidered in a corner.

For a moment I stood staring like a fool, shouting for a taxi. Then, stepping back into the shade, I pushed the handkerchief into my hip pocket and wondered what Nona Nicolas was doing in Singapore, and what the object of her journey to Indonesia could be—for surely she had been climbing those stairs on the same errand as mine. Possibly Marcos Aragon could tell me. . . .

Jerampang Road turned out to be just short of Katong—not close to the sea, though. Number 61 was the best-looking house in that end of the road, bigger than its neighbours, more secluded in a smallish but crowded garden. A Tamil gardener with a gleaming sweaty black skin was cutting grass with a long knife on a slope fronting the white Spanish-looking house. A fat Chinese amah nursed a fat baby under a jacquemontia arch, and a good-looking yellow Labrador gave me a tolerant glance as I passed him on the neatly paved path. I was received without a word by an old Chinese with a pock-marked, distant face, and shown a doorway screened by a beaded curtain.

Passing through the curtain, I found a long, comfortable room with a creeper-shaded window extending for almost the entire length of the



two outer walls. A number of toys littered the tile floor, and the man at the far end had to lift a toddler off his knee before he could get up to receive me.

This was Marcos Aragon, then—a heavy, slow-moving man, greeting me with a slow, shy smile. His race I couldn't decide on; he could have been Middle Eastern, or Jewish, or even Spanish, as his name suggested. But he was much more an individual than a type, somewhere between



forty and fifty, probably as generous to himself as to others, a comfort lover, tolerant and soft centred and friendly.

And very much a family man., As we were shaking hands a small girl came in, ten or eleven perhaps, and studied me with easy curiosity, while her brother gripped Aragon's blue garberdine trouser-leg—both beautiful children, with their father's soft brown eyes.

"Good morning, Mr. Avery," he said, not much above a whisper. "This is my daughter Sophie, and this is *young* Marcos Aragon. Say good morning to Uncle Robert."

The girl smiled charmingly and said, "Good morning, Uncle Robert." The little boy stared. As soon as Aragon showed me a chair and sat down again in his own, his small son climbed back on to his broad knee.

"Well, Mr. Avery, will you have some coffee? I can recommend it, because it is the one

I've chosen to drink myself from the various coffees I import from the archipelago."

Only once or twice had I tasted any as good. By the time I held the cup in my hand we'd gone through a routine of small talk and young Marcos had been favourably enough impressed by Uncle Robert to have changed his position to my knee. The only point of any interest emerging from these preliminaries was that Aragon had been born in Tangier,

which I ought possibly to have guessed. Mixed Spanish and Moorish blood, I suppose.

Then we got down to it.

Lowering his coffee cup, he said, "You wish to know something about Mr. Andrew Avery?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, there need be no difficulty about that."

"I hope not," I said, hoping.

"What, precisely, though, do you wish to know?" The voice was warm and lazy, a strangely bedroom voice, I found myself reflecting freakishly, intimate and sensuous. He was smiling agreeably, as if our meeting was giving him real pleasure.

"His family have heard nothing of him for about a year," I said. "Naturally we are anxious to know what has happened to him."

"I understand. Well, it is lucky that I saw your advertisement, because I am most probably your only chance of discovering what you wish to know."

I said I didn't understand that.

"Of course not. But you will not have been offered any useful information by anyone else; I think I can say that with some assurance."

I said he was right there, for the present.

"For the future too—be sure of it, Mr. Avery."

I waited. Young Marcos leaned back against my arm and went to sleep in warm, sighing confidence. Sophie had served us with the coffee, very gravely, and gone out again.

"I am a businessman, of course," Aragon said then, "so I have taken it for granted that your inquiry was in fact an offer to deal. For information of value your family are prepared to pay, I take it."

"If it is of definite value, yes."

"You can be quite confident of that. Well, Mr. Avery, would you like to make your bid?"

I didn't like that at all. I would never have made a businessman, anyway. "I'd rather you quoted your price," I hedged.

"Very good." He folded one heavy knee across the other and smoothed back his glossy hair. "Lady Hughley's fortune was a large one, very large. For the information required to release it, I would not consider ten per cent an unfair price."

My exclamation roused the sleeping boy, who blinked up at me like a small angel and went to sleep again. I was silent while I made extensive adjustments to my estimate of Aragon. Then, glad to change the subject for a moment, I said, "You have two fine children, Mr. Aragon. Or three, perhaps?" I'd recalled the baby in the amah's arms under the jacquemontia arch.

"Six," he corrected me proudly.

Just then the bead curtain rustled, and Sophie came in again, followed by a small girl a few years younger and just as pretty. Angela was introduced to Uncle Robert, shook hands shyly, and went over to her father, who kissed her fervently. Then he dismissed them both to the garden.

But how had Aragon come to know about Aunt Julia and her money? I said, "You're well briefed on our family affairs."

"Oh yes," was all he said to that.

"You haven't mentioned an actual figure yet," I reminded him. Did he, in fact, have an idea of the extent of the fortune?

"Make it a round one," he said gently. "Twenty-five thousand pounds." He said it dreamily.

I gave him an impatient stare. "We're wasting each other's time," I said. "My family would never pay a fraction of that. Did you honestly imagine they might?"

He answered without looking at me. "I seem to have overestimated your anxiety to obtain the information."

"Or underestimated our chances of obtaining it elsewhere," I suggested.

"Not that, believe me," he said, lifting a sombre glance my way. "You may have other leads, I don't know, but for your own sake I hope you won't put much faith in them."

I said, "I have other leads, yes, and I have plenty of time. For a moment I thought you might provide a short cut. Now I'll have to find the long way round, but I'm going to get there." And I said it again. "I'm going to get there."

I'd decided to treat our interview as abortive and leave no openings. Marcos Aragon wasn't very clever after all, it seemed, just a devoted family man who'd been dazzled by greed at the idea of meeting a negotiator for the heirs of a large fortune.

Yet I was reluctantly aware of a formidable simplicity about this man. I'd thought of him as soft-centred, but wasn't I perhaps all wrong there? Was he possibly hard-centred inside his soft, sweet exterior, like a peach? I began to suspect that his calm assurance rested on some concrete advantage he knew he enjoyed over me, and that he alone knew what had become of Andrew.

But that was too pessimistic a prospect to be entertained for long. I roused myself to cut Marcos Aragon out of the picture and begin again. I asked, "Where do I find a taxi?"

"I will telephone for one," he said and he heaved himself out of his chair, excused himself and left the room.

At that moment, a woman's richly warm voice with the same precise accent as Aragon's own floated through the open garden door. "We'll ask Daddy when the new uncle's gone," it said.

Then Sophie's breathy small voice: "Uncle Robert's nice. D'you know what he's doing now, Mummy? Nursing Marcos. Marcos likes him, too. He's gone to sleep on his lap." A pause for a quick breath, and then she asked, "D'you know who Uncle Robert's like? Uncle Andrew. His eyes are the same—terribly blue, but nicer, I think."

I went stiff with the guilty wariness of the eavesdropper.

"I think you should go in and take Marcos from the new uncle," the mother's serene voice suggested, but Sophie came back with a quick refusal. "No, he likes him. He said so." Then: "Mummy, isn't Uncle Andrew ever coming again?"

Aragon's soft footfall sounded as she spoke and then his plump hands pushed an opening through the bead curtain.

"Well, Mr. Avery"—he sighed, bending over and lifting his son gently out of my arms—"it is sad that you came here for nothing. But when you have exhausted your other leads I shall look forward to seeing you again.

"Look, let us understand each other," I said. "I can see that you mean what you say, that you will not help me unless your price is paid. Now can't you see that I mean what I say, that my refusal to negotiate further is final?"

The line made some impression on him, but he made no comment except a short sigh, after which he asked in a social tone, "Are you staying long in Singapore, Mr. Avery?"

"I shall have to stay until my Indonesian visa comes through," I told him, watching for any reaction to that.

His eyebrows reacted, jumping momentarily. "Oh, you're going to Indonesia?"

"So is Andrew Avery's wife," I said, watching closely.

I didn't expect his jaw to drop or his knuckles to turn white; but the way his dreamy eyes came wider awake for a second gave me satisfaction. I waited for his comment, but he didn't speak for twenty seconds and then only to say, "There's your taxi."

The two small girls were called in from the garden to say good-bye, and Sophie, with her delicious smile, asked, "When are you coming again, Uncle Robert?"

"Uncle Robert's going away for a while, my dear," the father said smoothly. "But he'll be here again before long, I expect."

She asked quickly, "Where are you going, Uncle Robert?"

"To find Uncle Andrew," I said, and turned to give Marcos Aragon a smiling good bye.

NEXT DAY was a blank.

There was nothing for me in the mail, and none of the fifteen hotels I telephoned had either a Miss Nicolas or a Mrs. Avery occupying a room. I decided she was staying with friends.

In fact, I spent a good part of the day thinking about Nona Nicolas. I wanted to see her again and force some sort of showdown, for my own sake as much as hers. The idea of her scared of me, running away, hiding from me, was hard to take; so was my curiosity about her. Had she really been Andrew's wife? Could there be something truly frightful about Andrew's death or disappearance, something that made sense of her neurotic fear?

I found myself looking for her all the time, my eyes constantly searching the streets, the traffic, the customers in the bank and the shops and bars. The time came when I had to ask myself the careful bachelor's question: Are you getting involved?

But she was my only lead now; if I didn't keep her in sight I might miss my one chance of cracking the mystery. Self-interest dictated a close interest in her and her movements, and elementary decency compelled sympathy with her distracted loneliness.

About sunset I returned to the Sultan Mustafa, took a shower, and lay on my hard, short bed, frowning up at the slowly spinning ceiling fan. Since noon blue-black thunder-heads had been advancing through the eastern sky, and now they hung over the sweating island like bomber squadrons massed for an attack. The air was heavy with suspense, thick and hard to breathe.

When Jaafar brought me my bottle of Tiger he set it down and leaned back against the door with a sleepy sigh.

"*Apu khabar*, Jaafar?" I asked him—"How goes it?"

The boy closed his dark eyes and heaved another exhausted sigh. It was the way everybody in Singapore was feeling, waiting for the storm to burst. When he spoke at last it was to list the alleged misdemeanours of Bah Feng, his old enemy the hall porter, and to remark with satisfaction on the fear in which Bah Feng went of some individual or organization that was riding him to hell. "Every time the telephone rings," Jaafar declared, "he begins to shake. I watch him sometimes."

I bet he did, too.

"Last week"—he moved closer and lowered his voice—"last week before you came I saw him listen on the telephone with fear and look all round him and say no. He was speaking English, and many times he said no and he shook his head at the telephone. But when he had listened some more he was silent and stopped saying no. And then, after that, he hung his head and said yes. Then he hung up the telephone and looked round him in fear and then he took some letters from the rack where the letters of the guests are placed and he called Lee Choy to take his place at the desk for a wink and he went away fast with those letters."

I found myself recalling Bah Feng's sly mask of denial when I'd asked him for mail on my arrival.

I turned my eyes and met Jaafar's. "We will see," I said suddenly.

While he watched me with muted curiosity I typed an address on an envelope: "Robert Avery Esq., Sultan Mustafa Hotel. BY HAND." Then I began to type a note:

Dear Robert, Great news for you, but in great haste. My phone's out of order and I'm rushing off to a job up in JB that will keep me till all hours, so will you come along to my office in the morning, any time after nine, and I'll give you all the details about Andrew.

Remembering old Smithy's words to his crony Jeff, I added, "The whole answer was right under our noses all the time! Now I must run. Yrs, Harry."

I folded the sheet of paper, put it in the envelope and sealed the flap.

"We will see, Jaafar," I said. "Put this in your pocket, go out into the street for a minute, and come back with it to Bah Feng, saying a *sais* had stopped a car outside the entrance and handed it to you. Then we will see what he does."

Jaafar went out with a slow smile of complicity on his face. There was a corner by the top of the stairway from which I could see Bah Feng's head bent over a Chinese newspaper. After I'd waited there in my dressing-gown for a couple of minutes, Jaafar came in from the street, admirably casual, and threw the note on to the desk.

The hall porter read the address, but his face, which was like a skull's face, showed no reaction. Nodding briefly to Jaafar, he stuck the note in the mail rack and took up his newspaper again. But the moment Jaafar had strolled through the door into the restaurant he seized the phone and began a conversation, holding it very close to his mouth.

It was not long before a young Chinese came in—a very average Singapore youth, his hair lavishly creamed, his shirt perfectly laundered, his blue cotton slacks sharply pressed and tapering to a slender waist. This youngster said nothing to Bah Feng, and Bah Feng said nothing to him, but my note travelled fast from Bah Feng's hand to his, and he went straight out again.

As I dressed for the evening a distant thunder-clap growled through the sky and for five minutes sparse, heavy raindrops sprinkled the city. But the storm tension hadn't yet reached breaking point, and when I left the hotel the streets were dry and so airless they felt like underground tunnels.

The night's suffocating heat drove me into Compton's, because it was air-conditioned. It was rather smart, too, for Singapore, and at least I'd get a decent supper there, for which the artificial coolness and non-humidity would induce an appetite.

In the days when I'd gone round Singapore with Zella I'd spent a fair amount of time in Compton's and as soon as I entered the dimly lit chill of the bar I was recognized—first by the little Filipino barman, then by a loud-mouthed back-slapper I had forgotten with complete success but

who hadn't forgotten me; and then, as my eye was appreciating a temptingly bare back, the dark head turned over the bare shoulder and Zella was back in my life again.

In the same moment the storm burst—thunder, lightning and Niagaras of rain all at once.

Zella was somebody I'd seen a lot of at the end of my national service in Malaya. When the battalion had sailed home I'd been left in hospital with pneumonia, and before I was discharged I'd talked a good-natured staff officer into fixing me two months' unpaid leave before embarking on a troopship home. The first month I'd spent in a small Malay village up near the Siamese border; most of the second I'd spent with Zella.

"Robert!"

The bare back shivered flatteringly under my hands as I kissed her. She left one arm round my neck while she made a number of not very coherent introductions, clipping her syllables as she always did when she was excited. Her crowd were all dressed for a real party, and I felt inadequate in my Palm Beach suit, so I wasn't sorry when I gathered they were on their way to a dinner at the Raffles given by, or for, a visiting airline chief. We made a date for lunch next day.

So now, after a couple of drinks, I dined alone, frowning quite a bit over my smoked trout and *brochettes*, seeing Zella for the first time as a problem. For one thing Zella was strictly for playtime. I was short of money, otherwise occupied, didn't know what she expected, and couldn't decide what I wanted myself.

When the waiter called me to the phone I felt a little stab of excitement, realizing somehow that I'd been waiting all the evening for something to happen. But it was only Zella. She had forgotten where we were to meet for lunch.

I repeated, the Elizabethan Grill at one thirty—and there was a short silence along the line. The phone box had a window, and the down-pour's hissing violence echoed through it and once or twice the semi-opacity of the glass turned a dirty yellow as lightning flashed.

"Well, how are you, Robert?" she asked then. "Happy?"

"Not un-," I told her. "And you?"

"Oh, I don't know. . . ."

I said suddenly, "Did you ever meet my cousin Andrew? Andrew Avery?"

"Was he your cousin?" she asked.

"You knew him, then?"

"A little. Once."

"But not any more?"

"My dear, he's dead, surely."

"Dead? Tell me about it."

"Well, isn't he?"

"Darling, I don't know. I'm asking you."

"Well, surely I heard he was dead."

It was no good. All it suggested was that a report of his death may have been going round, somewhere, in the past year and that Zella's rag-bag of a brain had some dim echo of the news on file. Or she could just as easily have confused him with somebody else altogether. I went back to my table and ordered coffee and brandy with a sigh.

I stayed on for more than an hour, reluctant to leave the dry coolness of the place. The storm was long and heavy, even for Singapore. Long after the thunder and lightning faded, the rain came plunging down through the dark sky. But when I left finally, a bit before midnight, it had stopped—at any rate, temporarily.

Sounds of rushing floodwater came from all directions. Compton's occupied one corner of a cross-roads of which three corners had been built up; but the fourth, an old Chinese burial ground, had been preserved from violation by builders. Except for a few cars splashing along the streaming highway, the cross-roads was lifeless. After waiting two or three minutes on the chance of spotting an empty taxi, I crossed over and began walking along the far side of the road that passed the dark burial ground. A sudden shout from across the street made me turn sharply.

An excited Chinese in a soaked shirt and slacks was beckoning me. When I didn't respond at once, he threw out an arm towards the dark cemetery at his back and shouted some agitated Chinese. I went over to him.

Half-way across the road I found myself wading through shallow floodwater. The deep monsoon ditch between the pavement and the cemetery had overflowed, and I saw by a flash of lightning the swollen torrent that plunged down the course of the ditch, sweeping along a tumbling mass of flotsam of all sizes from flower petals to a whole

uprooted banana tree and what looked like a hen-coop. The Chinese was now pointing upstream and there I saw the scars of a landslide, where part of a small garden and a cemetery tender's hut had collapsed and been mostly swept away in the flood.

I don't speak more than a dozen words of Chinese, so I asked in English, "What's wrong?" and then in Malay, "*Apa jadi?*"

The short but powerful-looking fellow stood in the floodwater that had drowned the grass verge of the monsoon drain, pointing into the torrent now and saying something I couldn't hear because of a thunder-clap. I moved up to him, feeling the water enter my shoes and chill my toes. At ordinary times a stream a few inches deep flowed along the bottom of the deep ditch, to meet another at right-angles on a corner of the cross-roads and dive there into a tunnel under the street that came out I don't know where. Now, though, a headlong spate of water, nine or ten feet deep, rushed to join the other, just as swollen and violent.

Before I could put another question the man's foot slipped in the mud, and he lurched against me. That, I mean, was what I thought had happened. I threw out an arm to steady him, and the next moment I had lost my own footing and was in the ditch, being swept at speed towards the deep under-street conduit that gulped down the floodwaters rushing towards its dark mouth.

I sank and swallowed water. I shot up again and had a glimpse of the Chinese, far upstream of me now, walking away across the road. A wooden box came spinning along the water surface and struck me in the face as I turned. Something had wound itself tightly round my neck. The water was cold. There was mud on my tongue and grit between my teeth.

I'd begun to swim before shock released my brain for thinking. But it wasn't any good. The sides of the ditch were steep, smooth concrete, and there was nothing on the flooded rim I could hope to grab or hold fast to. And there was no time. With the silent swiftness of a jungle beast dragging its prey to its lair the current was dragging me towards the black tunnel mouth.

What was so horrifying about the tunnel entrance was the revelation that it was almost full. The water had risen so far that instead of the tall Norman arch there was now nothing but a black crescent of space, only a few inches high, between the water level and the top of the arch.



This shallow crescent came rushing towards me and I threw up my hands. They slapped the cold concrete a foot above the water level, six inches above the top of the arch. Instantly my legs were gulped into the tunnel and I was thrown on my back with my fingers tearing at the concrete before my whole body was sucked into the drowning darkness.

What I remember is a blur. There was the coldness of the water and its devouring speed; the greasy roof of the tunnel as my knuckles and my forehead grazed it; the blind darkness; the smell I can't find a word for; the sharp pain of a torn-off finger-nail; the futility of a shout that perished before it found a single echo. . . .

Blinking dirty water out of my eyes, I stared forward into the darkness, treading water and using my hands to keep my balance as the fighting currents tried to overturn me. For all I knew, the subterranean waterway could be as little as forty yards long or as much as half a mile. The sea was perhaps seven hundred yards off in a straight line; I might be there before I could seize any initiative.

In fact, I got no more than a dozen yards after that thought flashed through my mind. There was a collision then in the darkness, a shock of tearing, piercing, down-dragging crushing, as if a crocodile had seized me. I had been hurled against a barrier formed of great branches—a whole tree, perhaps—an uprooted barbed-wire fence, timbers from a flood-capsized hut, and the smaller debris the barrier had trapped and held.

In the moment of impact I had gone under, and as I freed myself from the tentacles of the barrier some of my clothes had been torn and swept off me by the maniac force of the water, and wire had scored wounds on my shoulders and legs. A twig had jabbed my right eye. To keep my

mouth and nostrils above water I had to wedge myself against a heavy board that was itself wedged tightly, and suffer continual bumping of my head against the tunnel roof, because here there was no more than eight or nine inches of clearance.

The sweep of a car's headlights a long way forward, slowly passing the far mouth of the tunnel, revealed the death-blow to my last stubborn hope. Between me and the tunnel's end was silhouetted a dense forest of branches with debris caught in them. The water checked and swirled, but found its way through. But I couldn't hope to get through, any more than the drowned cockerel that was jammed in the branches right ahead of me.

Behind me, the water was rising.

Chapter Three

was going to die—alone and in the dark, squalidly. After a single dive—or rather, climb—down the barrier on the chance of finding a way through, and finding it even denser below the surface, I forced myself to stillness and attempted to control the headlong confusion of my thoughts. Deliberately I tried to think about the unknown enemy who had sentenced me to death. It must have been my fake letter that had convinced him I must be got rid of—like Smith, who was to have been our informant.

But all the while these thoughts occupied one part of my mind, another part was slipping out of control. Now, without warning, it collapsed and plunged me into a frenzy of claustrophobia. I was hideously aware of the wall of water piling up behind me; the thin, shrinking layer of air space. My head, wedged against the roof, felt the crushing weight of masonry pressing unbearably down upon me.

For an hour—longer, I don't know how long—I was reduced to the lowest that was in me. All that was left was a screaming, shaking, mindless pulp, a thing, not even an animal, a mere vehicle for agony. I'm grateful that I can remember so little of it. . . .

The plunge into frenzy had been as swift as a ski-run. The escape from it was as slow and laboured as the climb back to the summit. Reason must have taken hours to re-establish itself while I shivered with a

deathly cold and drifted close to the frontier of exhaustion. It took time for me to react when I became aware that the water level was sinking.

I said it in a shaking whisper. "I'm not going to die. I'm not going to die."

THE BIG Sikh night porter blinked his heavy-lidded eyes, and I could see him deciding that he had another drunk on his hands. I listened to myself explaining that I'd fallen down a monsoon drain. I sounded drunk, anyway.

The clock over the restaurant door showed four fifteen.

I must have smelt the tea, or else I saw the thin coil of steam rising from behind the ledge of his narrow desk. With a greedy lurch I leaned over the desk and saw the breakfast cup, filled to the brim.

"Can I have your tea?" I asked, without shame.

I hadn't yet seen myself in a looking-glass. When I did, upstairs, I understood his look better. What was left of my clothes was plastered close to my body with thin, drying slime. My chest, right shoulder and leg were naked and marked with red wounds. I was still shivering, and my eyes were fixed in a stare that must have looked closer to lunacy than to drunkenness.

He handed the tea over.

Some of it slopped over and scalded my chest, but most of it went down my gullet and worked a miracle somewhere farther down. When I replaced the empty cup in the saucer my hand had stopped shaking. I felt life returning and I felt equal to climbing the stairs.

Stripped in the shower, I saw how my long-soaked skin had shrunk into white ridges and wrinkles, like a half-empty balloon. When I felt clean at last I could scarcely crawl back to my bed; but once I'd fallen across it and snapped out the light I found that sleep wouldn't come. Until Jaafar came in with my morning newspaper and coffee I lay there in a restless fury, determined on a second manhunt. As well as finding the truth about Andrew, I was going to hunt down my enemy and strike back at him.

Jaafar's face never gave away much, but I could see that he must have heard something from the night porter. He looked from my lacerated chest, stained with iodine, to the sodden, smelly rags on the floor. "Ah!" he said. "*Tuan sudah luka.*"

"Yes, I'm wounded, Jaafar," I said. "Is Bah Feng in yet?"

Yes, he said, Bah Feng had just come on duty.

"Tell him to come up here, then," I said.

He went off, and in less than a minute there was a knock on the door. I was out of the bed by then, in shorts and slippers, looking out of the window with my back to the door. The moment Bah Feng was inside I whirled round and got him by the throat and threw him across the bed.

The emaciated, flimsy lightness of his body made it strangely disgusting. I'd been going to sit on his chest and choke the truth out of him; but now I had a sickening suspicion that his frail ribs and lungs might collapse under my weight. He'd gone so limp with terror there was no need for violence, anyway.

I said, "Now you are going to tell me who got those letters you stole from me."

His grey death mask of a face was expressionless; his open, gasping mouth didn't speak. I had relaxed my grip on his stringy throat, loathing the touch of it. "Answer, or you will not get out of this room alive!" I muttered at him, glaring into his small, mud-coloured eyes.

With a weak gesture he shook his grey crew-cut head. I believe he knew I wouldn't kill him; Westerners talked tough, but they hadn't the heart for brutality of, say, the Japanese during the occupation of Malaya. But there was somebody else who easily might kill him, and the ones poor folk had to co-operate with were those who had power and *used* it. Bah Feng had no real choice.

I didn't submit at once to the logic of this. Looking him in the eye, I told him that if he didn't start to talk within thirty seconds I was going to smash his jaw.

"You know you can trust me," I said. "You know you can tell me." And I turned my eyes to the second hand of my watch.

When he saw my fist gathering, he closed his eyes. It was a half-hearted blow, because the resolution was draining out of me. I struck with pity dragging at my elbow, but even so it is a foul memory. His papery body reared up, his grey face contorted for a moment; then he fell back, body slack and face impassive, waiting for the next blow, and the next, for whatever I chose to inflict on him.

My fury collapsed in shame, and I stared down at him, disgusted with him and myself. There was nothing to be done. I could have called the

police, of course, and Bah Feng would have sneered. The police didn't mean business, either. The man whose voice on the phone brought the sweat out on Bah Feng's grey skin—he meant business.

I strode across to the window and said, "Get out!"—glaring down into the street. I didn't hear him go, but when I turned again he had gone. He hadn't spoken one word.

UNTIL MIDDAY I tried to sleep, but it was no good. I shaved then, showered, and dressed for lunch with Zella.

Out in the street I remembered suddenly that my life was in danger. It was the same brittle, alert sensation, with an undercurrent of self-mockery, that prickled under my skin back in 1952 when I drove through any ambush area up in the Federation where Communist terrorists were known to be active. And in the same way the sensation rather soon wore off. After all, it was one thing to make an attempt on the life of an unsuspecting victim on a deserted midnight road and quite another to attack an alerted quarry in the crowded midday streets of a great city.

I watched the traffic, though.

Presently I saw a big Buick pass me and glimpsed Marcos Aragon sitting beside the smart *sais*. But he didn't see me. A couple of minutes later I saw the car parked in the space between the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank and Whiteaways' corner. From the back seat a beautiful smile greeted me as I passed it.

"Hello, Uncle Robert!"

Miss Sophie Aragon and her sister, identically dressed in buttercup yellow with tiny pearl necklaces and small ostrich-leather handbags, showed a flattering pleasure in the meeting. "You said you were going away," Sophie said.

"I am, but not today," I told her.

"And are you really going to see Uncle Andrew?" she asked.

"I hope so."

"Daddy said no. Daddy said you didn't know where Uncle Andrew is. Nobody knows, he said."

I just smiled and let her talk. Aragon wasn't in sight—making a business call, presumably.

"If you do see Uncle Andrew will you tell him I've forgiven him?"

"Yes, I will. But forgiven him what?"

"Oh, he'll know."

The younger one, Angela, said, "He told her she talked too much."

"He was rough," Sophie complained. "He wasn't always the same, you know"—two verdicts I had passed on Andrew myself when I was about her age.

I asked her, "How long ago was it that you saw Uncle Andrew?"

"Oh, a long time." Her lovely eyes went wide and sad. "The week after Marcos's birthday."

I asked her when young Marcos's birthday was, and she said the last day of March.

So it was a good eleven months since Andrew had been out to Jerampang Road. And that, of course, was nearly two months after the last letters had passed between him and Aunt Julia.

I reflected that sudden fits of irrational irritation had been a disconcerting feature of his two-month relationship with me back in 1940 Andrew crouching over his pet green snake or lying naked on the rock above his private pool in the jungle and saying, "Go away, young Robert, I don't want you." And more than once the words that had wounded Sophie: "You talk too much. Shut up, young Robert."

It was amazing how vividly Sophie brought back the most disturbing of all my memories of Andrew—of one of the nights we'd spent together in the jungle, five miles from Sungei Sunyi bungalow, with only the old Malay tracker Ngari as escort. It began by being one of the most intoxicating experiences of my ten years of life, but just when we were going to bed in Andrew's cave something happened. We were throwing some more of the wood we'd gathered on to the fire outside the cave mouth, and I made a clumsy job of rearranging a couple of the half-burnt sticks. One of them twisted in my hand and the burning end fell across Andrew's thigh, searing through the hem of his shorts and the skin beneath.

Before I could gasp out an apology he turned on me with a terrible face, mouthing swear-words, his blue eyes blazing in the low-angle fire-light. Before I could escape he seized me with his left arm and with his right pulled a flaming brand out of the fire. It was still flaming when he pushed it hard against my thigh. I screamed in terror, believing he meant to burn me alive. His fury was insane, like nothing I'd ever seen.

Ngari had gone to set lines in the river for our breakfast fish, and I thought I would be dead before he could answer my screams.

"That's what you get for hurting *me!*" Andrew whispered through his teeth, holding my thin thigh and the brand together. "And if you tell Ngari or Father or anybody, *ever*, I'll kill you. I'll kill you."

Fear even more than pain kept me awake in the cave that night. I hadn't let Ngari see the wound, and I lay crying silently for hours, staring into the red fire as it slowly died outside the cave mouth. In the middle of the night, when I heard Andrew moving about, I went rigid with fear; but he came and lay down beside me and put his arms round me and whispered, "Oh, Robert, I'm sorry, I'm sorry! You're only little and you didn't have a chance."

I was only relieved that he wasn't going to punish me any more. I was clenching my teeth so as not to sob, and so I couldn't say anything. I was too bewildered, anyway, to know what to say.

At sixteen a boy's mental and psychological age vacillates a good deal, I suppose. That midnight Andrew was hardly older than I, frightened by what he'd done in a momentary madness, longing to propitiate his victim and be forgiven. But after a short sigh he became silent—re-emerging from childhood, I think. Only a couple of minutes later he fell easily asleep, one arm still round me, while I lay in agony but grateful for his company and sympathy, already forgetting some of the vicious cruelty of his attack.

It all flashed brilliantly through my mind now. The whole love-hate and dread-devotion of my weeks as Andrew's companion at Sungei Sunyi seventeen years earlier were brought into close focus again, and I stared over the roof of the car out across the blue roads crowded with ships at anchor and I felt closer to the man I was hunting. . . .

Rousing myself, I asked Sophie, "And that was the last time you saw him?"

"Yes." A little sigh. "He went away in the night with Mr. Lyle."

I asked who Mr. Lyle was, but she shook her head. "We never saw him, Angela and I. He came that night when we'd gone to bed. But I woke up, and there was a car starting, and I heard Daddy say, 'Well, good-bye, Andrew. And good-bye, Mr. Lyle; it's nice to have met you. Look after Mr. Lyle, won't you, Andrew?' And the car went off, and Uncle Andrew hadn't even kissed me good-bye."

I knew all about it, the desolation Andrew could inspire with his displeasure. He'd even said to me once, "You're like all the rest. You aren't really my friend, young Robert. I suppose I won't ever find a real friend. You all let me down." It had been, of course, the sentimental whine of egomania.

Then Sophie was asking me about my bruises, and suddenly I had a cold sensation of being watched. Hurriedly I said good-bye to the little girls, as if I'd become aware of a dangerous contagion about me and didn't want to expose them to further risk. I had the feeling that Sophie had told me something of value, but it was going round in my head like a bone in a mouthful of fish, for the moment defying isolation and extraction.

THE WIDER Zella opened her dramatic eyes, the lower I pitched the key of my narrative. "So then it was just a matter of waiting," I concluded, "until the level fell and the current slackened enough for me to swim against it out of the tunnel. I still haven't slept—do I look like hell?"

"Darling! But you must feel like the K of D!" Zella uses initials rather a lot.

"I do feel a little like the kiss of death, but it's good to see you across a table again."

She smiled her absent-minded smile, with her greeny-grey eyes still brooding a little over the story of my ordeal. Now, after giving her *sole Walewska* a few moments' attention, she looked up and said in a lowered voice, "I suppose it's no good asking whether you're in the Secret Service now, because if you were you'd still say you weren't anyway."

"Well, I'm not, Zella," I said.

"That's what I mean." She sighed. "And this about Andrew Avery, too, and looking over your shoulder all the time. So C-and-D, I mean."

I got that after a blink. "It's not cloak and it's not dagger, my dear, but it's not fun and games, either."

"You're not the type, anyway, so if you are I think it's a great mistake," she declared obscurely. She was wearing a rather prim dress of darkly shaded peacock green, but she didn't look at all prim in it. "Now Andrew Avery *was* rather the C-and-D type, wasn't he?"

"I never met him, except when we were kids. Now listen. I need to find every detail I can about him." And then I told her why.

It was rather gratifying to make yet another profound impression on her. She dropped her fork on hearing the figure of Aunt Julia's estate and became deadly serious.

"But, Robert, I can't tell you anything that'll help. I'm so awfully sorry." She stared tragically across the table. "Before I ever met you I went to a couple of parties with him and came here dancing once or twice."

I didn't care for the idea of Andrew's having preceded me in the list of Zella's friendships. Just a bit resentfully I said, "You never mentioned him to me before."

"But I did," she contradicted. "I asked you once if you were anything to do with Andrew Avery and you said, 'Nothing at all,' with your schoolmaster expression, so I said no more. Anyway, I didn't approve of him either."

"No?"

"He sulked," she said, "and you had to be awed by him; that's what he wanted, and I'm not much good at awe. So it never came to anything."

That was better. I asked her, "When was this?"

"Nearly a year before I met you. He'd got a job as security officer on an estate up in Johore, but he seemed to take a good deal of time off."

"He left that job under a bit of a cloud," I told her. "Aunt Julia had to sign a sizeable cheque. D'you know where he went then?"

"North Borneo. Sandakan, I think."

I knew that. "And that was the last you heard of him?"

"The last I saw of him. I heard a little more of him a long time after from his wife."

"You met his wife?"

"Just over a year ago. She'd come over from Borneo for a hospital check-up—a little actress who'd toured with a company in Korea and Hong Kong and the Federation. I heard they got married a fortnight after they met. She was a nice little thing—desperately in love. She told me that Andrew was leading a very quiet life. His former friends would hardly know him; she thought. I think she might have been rather easily fooled."

I changed the subject. "What would you know about a fellow called Marcos Aragon?"

She frowned. "Aragon? You don't suppose I have dealings with *him!*"

"What sort of dealings?"

"The twenty-five-per-cent sort, of course."

"You mean he's a moneylender?"

"What else, darling!"

I thought about that a bit. Well, Andrew had been no stranger to moneylenders, from what we'd heard.

"I had the idea he was a respectable coffee merchant."

"He *is* a respectable coffee merchant. A respectable family man, too. But a very busy bloodsucker as well, darling."

"He claims to know what's happened to Andrew."

"But isn't telling?"

"It would cost too much."

"I expect he does know. I believe he hasn't many clients, but he keeps them. He sticks around, like all bloodsuckers that know their business."

"His children are charming," I said.

"He's charming himself, they say."

Silence then, while I considered the situation. As I said before, Zella was strictly for playtime. You couldn't cast her for melodrama. In the presence of any serious purpose or responsibility she'd be only a distraction and in a situation of risk or danger a definite hindrance. She knew it, too. I said, "When I'm free again we'll see each other, eh?"

That would be nice, she agreed, choosing pineapple for dessert. I decided on Gruyère, and we were silent as the waiter served us. When he'd gone I said, "There are plenty of ways of explaining Andrew's disappearance. He may have committed suicide; he may be hiding because he's got one of those horrible tropical diseases like leprosy or elephantiasis; he may be in prison; he may be in a madhouse; he may have gone native somewhere with a dusky bride, or two dusky brides.

I expected a swift come-back from Zella, because if any of those was the explanation why should my letters be stolen and my life endangered? But instead she asked, "Was it at Sungei Sunyi you stayed with Andrew when you were boys?"

"Yes. It's a rubber estate up in Perak, fifteen miles from——"

"I know. The manager's staying in this hotel. Sam Chester. He's only been six months at Sungei Sunyi." She put down her fork with sudden



animation. "Let's see if they're having lunch. We could have coffee with them. Sam's such fun, and Winnie's a scream."

I got it. Sam Chester was such fun, and I hadn't been fun. I'd bored her with my melodrama. When I'd paid the bill we went along to the hotel dining-room, and as soon as we were through the door Zella called a greeting and a heavy man with an auburn beard slapped two great hands on his table and lumbered to his feet.

"Nicely timed, Zella!" his deep voice boomed out. "Hadn't the nerve to order a brandy with Winnie looking her usual daggers across the table. Now let her try to stop me!"

Zella laughed, her spirits rising fast, and introduced me to the Chesters. Hearing my name, Sam Chester frowned and boomed, "Avery? Now where was I hearing that name just the other day?"

"My Uncle Matthew planted some of the trees you're tapping up at Sungei Sunyi," I told him. "He was manager there from 'thirty-six until the Japs came."

"Ah! Must've seen it in the books," he said. I'd never heard a deeper voice. It seemed to vibrate under your feet, the way pedal notes on an organ do. His light blue eyes were guileless, and there was a sturdy, wholesome look about him, reminding me of the sea-captain hero of a boy's adventure book.

Zella had sat down beside his wife, kissing her first. The two women made a sharply contrasted pair. Like her husband, Winnie Chester was in her fifties. She wore a salmon-pink dress with a gigantic pattern, giving her the look of a refugee who had been fitted out from a relief shipment of cast-off clothing.

But her face, when you got round to it, made you forget the dress. I suppose all that it's necessary to say is that Winnie Chester was a good woman and you could tell it at a glance. Her calm face had the pink, scrubbed look of so many elderly nuns. Through her glasses her blue eyes were bright with humour and sharp with a shrewd knowledge of the world, but candid and generous.

Zella had a healthily balanced crowd of friends, so it didn't surprise me to find her on affectionate terms with this unsophisticated pair. She was telling them now, "You ought to invite Robert up to Sungei Sunyi. He was there when he was a boy."

I was invited on the spot.

"We don't get so many visitors," Winnie said, beaming a welcome. "Singapore folk think it takes a hero to venture up our valley."

"Only one incident in the past fourteen months," Chester boasted. "One feller killed in an ambush. Before our time."

"If you feel like driving back with us," Winnie said, "just give us a ring tomorrow night."

"And don't let Zella put you off," Chester cut in. "Far more murder and sudden death here in Singapore."

Zella's eyes met mine.

I remembered something. "Before I forget," I said to Zella, with a glance of apology to the Chesters, "would you know anything about a man called Lyle?"

"Lyle . . . No, I've never heard that name out here."

"But I have," Chester said slowly, his fingers tugging at his beard. "Not so long ago, either. Winnie, what was it we heard about a feller called Lyle? Or was it somebody we met?"

But Winnie hadn't the faintest recollection.

Chester fixed his wife with a mild, expostulatory gaze. "I tell you, Winnie, I've come across that name in the past couple of months, I'll swear it."

Through the fog-belt of mystery surrounding Andrew, this slender lead came like a faint blink of light. It was a sadly weak signal, but in that dark, suffocating fog it offered at least an illusion that I wasn't totally lost, and it was then that the intuition first came to me, like a whisper, that the answers to my questions could best be sought at Sungei Sunyi.

BAH FENG and I faced each other uneasily across his desk. I said nothing as I held out my hand for my key, angry and ashamed of myself. Without a word he handed over the key and with it a small slip of paper. I unfolded it at once.

Message from General Hospital for Mr. Avery. Received one forty. Miss Nicolas asking for you in Room D2.

My watch showed three thirty. Fifteen minutes later I pushed open the Shanghai doors of private room D2. Nona Nicolas, pale, her hair dank, looking as if she were dying, didn't smile as she saw me. I had remembered her as beautiful; seeing her now, like this, was a shock.

I said, "I was out when your message came."

She looked at me in deep, troubled silence, and then at the swing-door. Her terror laid a cold hand on me.

"What is it?" I said.

She spoke at last. "I had an accident."

"Thank you for asking me to come."

She avoided my eyes. "I got into a panic. The friend I'm staying with is going to have a baby. I didn't want to upset her. There was nobody but you to send for."

I asked how she'd known where to find me.

"I asked them to call the Indonesian Consulate."

"I'm glad you realized you could trust me. I was afraid you didn't."

"I don't know" She had shut up again like a shell. On an impulse I sat on the bed and took her restless hands in my own right hand.

"Now, listen," I said. "You sent for me, and here I am. Tell me what it's about. What sort of accident?"

Her eyes were lovely still. She took a deep breath, and then she started to tell me in short, exhausted sentences.

"I've been staying at Kuala Pecha, up on the Johore Straits. My friend's house isn't right on the sea, but her neighbours, the O'Neills, have a beach along the end of their garden, and I've been bathing from there. I sleep very badly and I'm always awake before sunrise. The last three mornings I've been in swimming while the sun rose—it's lovely then. Only this morning there was a speed-boat roaring about, one of those things that spin along the surface with their noses in the air. It spoiled everything, so after I'd been in for three or four minutes I turned back towards the shore. Then it—it came for me."

Her hands were cold and damp, and all the time they tensed and untensed as if her body were racked with pain. She swallowed hard, and went on. "There was a man in the boat, very sunburnt, wearing black sunglasses. The thing came straight at me, and I threw up my hand to warn him, but he came on. I was slow. I didn't believe it possible until it was almost on me, and even then I was paralysed for a second or two before I dived. So I was too late."

"You mean, you were hit."

She had closed her eyes, as if I'd shouted at her. "The boat didn't hit me. The man had a sort of long club, like an oar. I suppose he aimed at my head, but instead hit me a glancing blow on the neck and shoulder. I went under and swallowed a lot of water. When I got hold of myself and started swimming for the beach again I heard the boat coming back, roaring. . . ."

I said, "Take it easy," because under the sheet her whole body had begun to shake.

When she spoke again her voice had risen sharply, as if she were on the point of bursting into tears. "And then I thought I was going to be killed and I dived again, but too soon and I hadn't taken a deep enough breath. I had to come up after a few seconds, and I knew I'd come up right in front of the boat. But when I surfaced the boat had swung out to sea, and I saw Harry and Christina O'Neill on the beach. I'd told them how good a sunrise swim was, and they'd got up early to join me, and the man in the speed-boat had seen them and sheared off."

I looked down at her, and the helplessness of her went to my heart—I can't think of any other way of saying it.

The locker by her bed was almost bare—not a flower, not a book, only an untouched newspaper supplied by the hospital. It was folded to show a headline—LOVERS' SUICIDE PACT: DEATH SLEEP IN LOCKED ROOM.

I made a mistake then. I said, "Listen, we're in this together. You nearly died this morning. I nearly died last night. We share an enemy, you see. So why don't we fight back together and start by sharing information? It may be our one chance."

She only turned away.

"I know you were Andrew's wife," I told her. "That's no secret any longer."

I didn't know whether she'd taken in what I'd just told her. "Last night somebody tried to murder *me*," I said. And I added, watching her face, "I believe you know who."

"No!" Her eyes flew open on the swift, sobbing denial.

"I don't mean the man in the boat; I mean the man who hired him."

"I don't know."

"I can't help believing you do. You're *afraid* you know."

"No, no!" She had begun to cry, her face plain and hopeless and agonized.

"Nona, don't," I pleaded, desperately moved. "For God's sake, let me help you."

But she shook her head weakly and turned away as if I'd betrayed her. I saw a dusky flush, like a stain, below her ear—the edge of the contusion from the blow that had failed to murder her.

There is an instinctive gesture for a man who finds himself helpless to allay a woman's distress. I bent and kissed her. All I could think of to say was, "Tell me where to look for him, this man you're afraid of. Do you really not know?"

Like a child, she sobbed, "No, I really don't, but you won't believe me."

"Is his name Lyle?" I asked, because the name had just flashed through my mind.

In the middle of a sob she went silent, and under the sheer her body stiffened into rigidity—just for a second, just long enough for me to be

sure the name had meaning for her. Then she was sobbing again, her head turning helplessly from side to side on the pillow.

The sort of toughness it would have taken to press the inquiry is something I haven't got. I changed the subject. "What did the police say?"

"There was a speed-boat stolen yesterday," she said painfully. "From one of the officers at the naval base."

"No idea who the fellow was?"

She shook her head and then told me, "I didn't tell the detective anything about—I let him think it was an accident. I didn't tell Harry or Christina, either. Only you."

A big butterfly flattered past the window, dark against the blazing blue sky. What was happening with me and this girl? My hand held her hands, and I was smoothing the damp hair from her white brow. A disturbing suspicion startled me, a suspicion I could not force myself to face squarely; so I thought ahead, to the moment when I should leave the hospital and she would be alone again, listening for a murderer's footsteps.

Would it be any good asking the police for a guard? Surely not. It was so obvious that she was confused, and then she'd withheld the truth from the detective who'd interviewed her that morning. And would she confirm the story if I told it to the police now, anyway? I was ready to do guard duty myself, though I longed for sleep, but I could picture the hospital authorities' reaction to that proposition.

Suddenly she drew one of her hands away with a little moan and held it over her eyes.

"For God's sake help me, Robert!" she whispered. "Tell me what to do."

A sensation of crisis shocked me out of my fatigue. The desperation of not knowing what to do, of being utterly without answer or resource, filled me with a crazy urge for violent action. I spoke her name helplessly, and in a moment I was kissing her cold lips and feeling her hands clasp behind my neck.

I suppose I didn't react at once to the alarm that seized her a moment or two after that. Until I opened my eyes I didn't see how her own were turned towards the door, wide with fear. And the door was swinging gently, as if it had just been softly released.

It took two or three seconds to free myself from her tightly clinging hands and get round the bed to the door. I dashed down the corridor and round the corner, but there was no one in sight.

When I went back to her room I found a stout Indian doctor there and a smallish, baldish man I liked the look of. He was Harry O'Neill, her friend's neighbour, who had taken her out of the sea, wounded and shock-shattered, that morning at sunrise.

He said to her, "Now Christina and I didn't like the idea of your staying alone in here, so I've persuaded Dr. Rajaratnam to sign your order of release on condition that we'll put you to bed. Mrs. Kerr isn't too well today, so you'll be better in with us." I remembered that Nona's friend was going to have a baby; that must be the explanation of that last statement.

I was conscious of relief and release. O'Neill, with a house and a wife, could guarantee her the comfort and security she needed, though I realized almost at once that guarantee was a strong word to use with that other word, security. While a nurse was helping Nona to dress, I had a word with him at the end of the corridor.

"You don't know me," I began, "and after you've listened to what I'm going to say you may suspect that I'm not all there. It's got to be said, though."

His thoughtful grey eyes studied my face as I spoke, and I realized how I must look to him, grey with exhaustion and anxiety, the barbed-wire cuts scoring my cheek and one eye blinking out of a big blue bruise—looking as unbalanced as what I was saying must sound, in fact.

But when I'd told him all of it that was good for him to know, he merely nodded. "Well, I can't put a twenty-four-hour guard on her," he said, "but she'll have an upper-floor bedroom and we've got a good noisy dog."

I liked the sound of that dog.

And then Nona came out of the room, pale and with her arm in a sling. We both went forward to help her, but it was my arm she clung to.

O'Neill was just right, acting as if there were no undercurrents to the situation. As I helped her into his car, a Ford convertible, he was saying to her, "Christina'll have a cup of tea ready for you. Just one short call to make in town, and we'll be on our way. Should catch the sunset over the straits."

I stood watching the tan-and-crearn Ford out of sight, almost getting run down by the black MG that started with a whoosh of acceleration behind me. When it caught up with the Ford it slowed and followed it, keeping close.

I hadn't seen the driver's face.

I YAWNED like a chasm as I took my key from Bah Feng's bony hand. Just as I was moving away from his desk a postman came in and threw a pile of letters on it.

Before Bah Feng's hand could reach them, I had scooped them up. "Any for me, I wonder?" I shot a glance at his rigid face as I said that. There were two.

Up in my room I opened one with a Singapore stamp first. It was from Marcos Aragon. He offered me, "gratis," the information that "already your investigating methods have enjoyed the attention of a certain deeply interested party," as a consequence of which he believed my life was in danger. He asked me to destroy his note.

If I hadn't been so dog-tired I might have laughed at this smug warning of a danger I'd collided with head-on already.

There was a Penang stamp on the second letter. The inexpertly typed sheet carried the printed heading, "MOHAMMED KHAN, General Merchant." The first line was promising.

Dear Sir,

Your advertisement in the *Straits Times* I have seen and hoping you will come to my assistance. Is owing me \$125 Mr. Andrew Avery. Three cheques I cash for him, one okay but two not any good unfortunately. I am very happy to hear from you. Till now not successful to find Mr. Andrew Avery's family. Two letters I sent to Mr. Lail but not getting any reply unfortunately. Your brother's cheques one \$100 and one \$25 can be seen here for your inspection.

Awaiting your kind reply and settlement of same in order to clear family name and Englishman's word of Honour.

Yours faithfully, Sir,
Mohammed Khan

I stared a long time at the letter after I'd read it. Certainly Mohammed Khan would get his hundred and twenty-five dollars. I felt a sick disgust at the revelation of Andrew's dirty little thefts from a small shopkeeper

who hadn't liked to refuse someone who looked so sound and seemed so friendly. How many more were there, I wondered?

But the letter's arresting line was the reference to "Mr. Lail." That was the way most Asians would spell "Lyle" phonetically. So Mohammed Khan had known something which persuaded him that there was a chance that Lyle would help get Andrew's debts settled—if only to the extent of putting him in touch with Andrew's family.

The letter reminded me that I had forgotten to order the re-insertion of my advertisement in the local papers. If I didn't telephone now, before I slept, it was going to be forgotten again. I went wearily down the stairs, through the bar and along to the black hole where the telephone lurked beside the side door giving on to a narrow, smelly alleyway. I had started to dial the first number when everything ceased, all sensation was cut off and there was only empty blackness.

I didn't even feel the blow. . . .

WHEN SENSATION came leaking back into my brain and body I found myself trying to remember the remaining digits of the number I had been dialling. There was a deep ache in my head and every part of me was damp with the sweat of a terrible heat—except my throat and tongue, which were parched as if a blow lamp had been played on them.

My eyes couldn't bear to open. There was a worse than hangover heaviness holding down their lids. When finally they opened, I found myself fixed by the stare of three unblinking eyes, two of them long and brown and strangely unreflecting, and the third perfectly round, the metal eye of a revolver muzzle.

The moment lasted a long time. I thought first of Nona Nicolas, remembering with relief that she was miles away in a friendly house, guarded by a noisy dog. By then I'd begun to study the impassive Eurasian face to which the long, metallic eyes belonged, and I made out one of the reasons for the eyes' dangerous look. They were set in circles of pale flesh that contrasted sharply with the deep tan of cheeks and forehead, a sign that dark sunglasses or goggles always hid them out of doors and a reminder of the man who had tried to murder Nona Nicolas that morning.

The small room was like a furnace, though the closed glass window was so black with night that it reflected me lying on the wide double

bed under the sick light of a naked bulb. I decided that this must be the top room of a house, immediately beneath a roof that had fried under twelve hours of unbroken tropical sunshine. With a swimming head I turned to look at the watch on my wrist. Past seven thirty. So I'd been out for almost two hours.

From the table the man lifted a large mug. He drank from it greedily, noisily, his eyes never once blinking, and I raised my hands unconsciously in a gesture of entreaty. At that he took a second mug from a small bamboo table and handed it to me. I struggled up and propped myself against the bed head, took the mug in both hands, and drank with my eyes closed. There must have been close to a pint of the stuff, but I drank it at one go, realizing as I finished that it had been the vilest coffee I'd ever tasted, and cold at that. But for the relief it brought to my tortured mouth and throat I sighed in gratitude as I handed back the mug.

The fellow with the gun took it in his left hand and looked into it before he set it down. And for the first time his long eyes blinked. I saw that and thought about it. Then I acted.

Moving one leg off the bed, I pointed towards an open door that led into a dark bathroom. "I'll have to go in there," I said.

"If you like," he answered. "There's no window."

He didn't get off his chair as I staggered across the room and through the low doorway. No, there was no window in there, but that wasn't the escape I'd been thinking of. There was just the lavatory pan and a standing tiled tank of water under a dripping tap with a big brass dipper hanging on a nail above it. He didn't follow me in, and I was out of range of his long eyes as soon as I'd turned through the door.

After ten or twelve seconds I pulled the chain. The moment the clamour of the emptying cistern began, I bent over the pan and pushed my forefinger down my throat. By the time the cistern ceased its uproar most if not all of the coffee had gone down the drain. After swiftly filling the dipper with water, I buried my lips in it and gulped down half a pint. What poison might be left in me would get heavily diluted that way, which might help.

Back on the bed I stared at the gunman. He had rolled his singlet up to his armpits as the Chinese do to cool their torsos, and was admiring the rich development of the muscle pad covering his stomach, playing

the finger-tips of his left hand up and down the tightly stretched brown skin.

"What comes next?" I asked, keeping it light and conversational. But I was exhausted still. I hadn't slept for nearly forty hours.

He showed me a fine row of teeth in a bored sneer.

"Are you wise," I asked him then, "hanging round Singapore after this morning? D'you think the police are going to find it so tough laying their hands on a Eurasian with a deep tan, and white circles round his eyes from always wearing dark sun goggles? A young Eurasian," I added, "with conspicuously fine physical development."

He listened to that. The finger-tips trailed down the columns of stomach muscle and fell on to his knee.

"Of course," I went on, trying to sting him, "you aren't free to get out of town. You have to stay and cover up for your boss. You couldn't be more expendable. If only you'd wake up you could . . ."

My voice trailed away dreamily. I had forgotten what I'd been going to say. And my eyes had half closed.

But I saw him blink—the second time.

I roused myself to work out the significance of that, and the time it took me suggested the answer. He had noted the weary abandonment of an uncompleted sentence. It was the first sign of what he was waiting for.

I was supposed to lose consciousness as my system absorbed the drugged coffee. It was time for my performance to start.

I propped myself against the head-board again, and said, "I hope you've heard what your boss stands to collect if this job comes off. But I suppose you'll settle for two or three thousand, when with the responsibility you're carrying you're a fool to take less than ten per cent—say sixty thousand dollars." I didn't suppose for a moment this lout would get more than two or three hundred for his night's work. I yawned a deep, unconscious yawn, and as I closed my mouth with a snap my frown of puzzlement was exactly in keeping with the act I wanted to put over.

But I was drowsy. For several minutes I tried to convince myself that there was nothing unnatural about it. I was bloody tired and had good reason to be—was it any more than that? But finally I had to admit that yes, there was more to it than that. Clearly I hadn't got rid of as much of the coffee as I'd thought.

I was sinking, sinking. The waves of fatigue were gongs, beating through my body like a tide in the blood. I was forgetting, I was fighting to hold on to memory and consciousness, but I was forgetting, memory was being torn to tatters and stripped away; the bed was spinning and my blood had accelerated, shooting through my veins to choke my heart.

Almost as soon as I began to wonder whether I was dying I became sure of it, but by then I was so weary that I reacted with only a remote pang of self-pity. After that I was no more than a ghost blown through blackness by the waves of sound from the great gongs.

Chapter Four

HE RETURN from nothingness was the slow, slow awareness of the moon. The setting moon appeared in the top left corner of the window and sank diagonally to the lower right corner. My eyes were open all the time, and it took me all those minutes to recover, bit by bit, the consciousness their dirty drug had stripped away from me.

I was still on the stale-smelling double bed in the hot, airless room. But most of my clothes had been removed, and there was something else. . . . Shock slowed down my perceptions again, and I swung back into dream for a while, but before the moon had left the window I knew it was no dream that I wasn't alone on the bed.

There was a warm, utterly still body close to mine. There was hair against my chin, a faint perfume. A woman. Nona.

I stared round the room. The chair was heaped untidily with our clothes. The bamboo table had been moved to the bedside, and on it I saw a woman's handbag, my own passport, keys and wallet, some loose money, two small empty bottles and a folded newspaper. The newspaper explained it all. It was folded, as the one in Nona's hospital room had been, so that the *LOVERS' SUICIDE PACT* headline was uppermost.

Well, it was a smart enough little scheme. X had wanted to get rid of me and he'd wanted to get rid of Nona. Two simple but clumsy attempts had failed separately, so he'd been faced with the necessity for a new, quick plan that would rouse no suspicion of foul play, two murders the police would never recognize as murders.

Either he or his jackal had seen me kissing Nona through the Shanghai

door of room D2 that afternoon and, like most other literate Singaporeans, he had read the report, or at least its headlines, of the naval officer's wife and her planter lover who had met for the last time in the top room of a seedy Chinese boarding-house, swallowed a whole bottle of sleeping tablets and died in each other's arms.

X knew, of course, what every coroner knows, that suicides are to some extent epidemic. A much publicized suicide, or any novel form of suicide, will frequently produce a small crop of imitative 'self-killings. So when Nona and I were found dead in each other's arms with the newspaper folded that way and empty sleeping-medicine bottles by the bed, the verdict would have been automatic.

I was feeling clumsily for Nona's heartbeat. When I found it I was shocked at its heavy, labouring slowness. She seemed scarcely to be breathing at all, but all the same my spirits were rising giddily. I had recovered the initiative.

Apart from a fierce headache and desperate thirst, I was myself again. I looked at my watch—seven hours' sleep. Moving softly, I went to the bathroom to drink and came back to put on my clothes and shoes. Then I opened the window.

Not so bad. We were only on the second floor above a street that was a narrow dead end. A dog nosing round a dustbin—no other sign of life. I wondered how many would be on guard. There might be nobody and nothing barring our way out.

I collected the dipper from the bathroom, a heavy brass affair with a black wooden handle. Then I deliberately tapped it against the concrete side of the water tank.

I waited near the door, ready for it to creep ajar. When it was thrown violently open, shock lost me a second of initiative. My blow with the bottom of the dipper should have struck the fellow's Adam's apple and put out his lights, but it caught him on the chin and merely shook him momentarily. He came out of his shock as fast as I came out of mine, and we started level then. I went straight into a clinch with him, scared of his gun, but the blow with the dipper must have loosened his grip on it so that he was still fumbling when I seized him, because I heard the thing fall and skid across the floor.

Despite his superior physique and training, I was bursting with confidence. A hard stamp on his instep doubled him up and brought his

chin down on to the cutting edge of the back of my hand. I think he must have been a little muscle-bound—his mind as well as his showy body. He ought never to have lost a fight to me, but that's what he did in less than three minutes. Certainly he couldn't have had the relish for the fight that I had. I was remembering Nona in the hospital bed, telling me the story of her ordeal in the sea that morning. I owed him a lot more than he owed me.

After two minutes of grappling we sprang apart and a neat job of tripping sent me spinning through the bathroom door to slam painfully into the tiled wall. He came charging in after me, and I met him with the last blow of the fight.

If the bathroom had been as big as the bedroom it might not have done him much harm, but it sent him sprawling off balance, and his head met the wall like a cricket ball meeting the bat; then a slithering on the wet floor, and finally a second crash. That was his skull hitting the tile floor.

None of it had disturbed Nona. I was calm now and moved methodically. I dressed her as best I could and passed the handles of her handbag over her arm. I picked up the gun and put it in my pocket with my wallet and passport. At first, when I lifted Nona, she seemed amazingly light; but I was breathing hard by the time I reached the street.

An empty taxi appeared miraculously within minutes; the Sikh driver ignored the time I took to get Nona in and get her out when we reached Sunderland Mansions. Zella's flat was in Derry House, sixty yards round the corner, but I hadn't risked taking the taxi any nearer.

After a second ring at her bell Zella said, "Who is it?" behind her door.

"It's Robert, Zella." I gasped like a runner bursting through the finishing tape.

She took a quick step back as she saw us. I was inside in a single stride, saying, "Shut the door, Zella, and for God's sake ring for a doctor you can trust."

"Darling!" She was standing rigid in a yellow dressing-gown, her hair tied in a net. "Trust?"

"Yes, one who won't ask questions."

She knelt beside the phone in the way I remembered and dialled a number, "Mick, it's Zella," she said after what seemed a ghastly long

time. "Mick, you must come at once."

"Overdose of sleeping tablets," I prompted her.

"No, somebody staying with me, Mick. She's taken too many sleeping tablets. Far too many. Hurry, Mick."

I was thanking God for Zella. She hung up and came and stood by me, looking down at Nona on the divan. She said, "In the little room, Robert."

When I'd carried her in and laid her on the bed Zella turned down, I said, "Best if I don't see this doctor. Can you say—well, what you've said already, that she's somebody staying with you?"

There was a sort of awe as well as curiosity in her eyes. "Robert, it's Nona Avery."

"Try not to tell him that. Make up a name if you like. If he asks how many tablets she took you'd better say a whole bottle."

I followed her as she went into her own bedroom for a nightdress. "Did she really, Robert?"



she asked me, taking a honey-coloured nylon affair from a drawer. "Try to kill herself?"

"No, Zella. That's why I want a doctor who won't talk."

She said, "Well, Mick's good."

"If he asks, say you think it was the same stuff as that couple took in Aden Street—you know, that suicide in the papers yesterday."

The doorbell rang:

I stayed in Zella's room, shut the door and switched off the light.

"Zella, my dear child, what *is* this?" His voice sounded right—strong and confident.

I heard Zella say, "Mick, I can't tell you much because it's an unhappy story and it's not my story. She's in here."

The first words I heard from Zella's doctor when the door of the small bedroom opened again after an hour made me suddenly weak with relief. "I'll look in later, midday perhaps, but you don't have to worry any more." The strong voice was easy and reassuring. "I don't mean the poor child isn't in an awful state—you must know she is. But this crazy fit is over, and I can't see her trying it again. You'll be good for her, Zella. Have some cosy girlish confidentials—that's what she needs as much as anything, I'd say."

"Mick, I can't tell you . . ." Zella sighed in her incoherent way. "You were wonderful! Why not let me make you some breakfast? It's almost time."

He laughed and said no.

I was in the small bedroom half a second after the flat door closed on him. Nona was staring round her with the sheet drawn up to her chin, like a frightened child unable to sleep in a strange room. I went down on my knee by the bed.

"They put us to sleep, but we're awake again," I said.

She looked relieved, and that brought beauty back to her face. She said, "They tore me out of Harry O'Neill's car while he called in at his office. They—Robert, where am I? Who's that girl? I've seen her somewhere."

“You met her once. Her name’s Zella Graham and she’s an angel.”

I knew Zella had come in as I said that, and I got up and took her hand and squeezed it.

"Go and have a bath, Robert," she said briskly. "Nona's going to rest;

doctor's orders. Coffee in ten minutes and you can tell me anything that's good for me to know."

Under the shower I felt like singing, though I knew I was dog-tired and my head ached. As soon as I smelt bacon and coffee I went out and gave Zella the story, all of it, over the kitchen table.

"What beats me," I finished up, "is how Nona survived the full sleeping-pill treatment. I suppose they underestimated somehow."

"Yes, they underestimated," Zella said dryly. "Only gave her enough to kill two."

I blinked with my mouth full of toast and bacon till she explained. "She hasn't been able to sleep for months, so she's been taking medicine—the same stuff that suicide couple took. When it didn't help any longer she doubled the dose her doctor had prescribed, and when that didn't work she doubled it again—and again. You should have seen Mick's face when she told him! But, of course, that saved her. She's got such a tolerance for the stuff now that half a bottle hadn't much more effect on her than half a bottle of Scotch on an old soak. All the same, without Mick she probably wouldn't have woken up again. She should have been dead hours ago, but as it is she'll probably be up and about this afternoon."

The future had been given back to us, but it was as fog-bound as ever. Despite that, when my cup and plate were empty I leaned back in my chair, fed and drowsy and clean; I felt almost reborn.

"Go to bed," Zella said, and I realized that I had been yawning.

In Zella's bed I fell asleep like falling down a well, but I was awake and up before midday.

Zella was unpacking stuff she had bought in the market. She had given her cook the day off, she said. Nona was asleep. I found Harry O'Neill's number and rang him, conscience-stricken that I'd forgotten to do it before I slept.

"We're safe," I said. "But I think it's better if you don't know where we are."

"The police, Avery," he cut in. "Naturally, I reported to them and now they're looking for Nona and probably for you. Wouldn't it be better——"

I said no. "I'm looking after this myself. Nona doesn't want the police in this, and no more do I." I thought of the dead or injured male pin-up.

"Suppose you know what you're doing," O'Neill said wryly. "Is there any way Christina and I can help?"

"Only by being ready to help if we send you an SOS. It's damned good of you."

"Well, you know my number." I don't think he had a lot of confidence in my grip on the situation.

Zella was cooking. Nona was still asleep. When I sank into the deep leather arm-chair to take a close, hard look at the immediate future I had to take up the white handbag that lay there. I held it absent-mindedly, idly opening and closing its ivory clasp until it fell open and a folded letter skimmed across the floor, and I saw the word at the top of the folded and dog-eared sheet.

The word was only "Saturday," but it's a word in which the letter *a* occurs twice, and the only other times I'd seen *a* written like that was in the few short letters I'd had from Andrew after my two months at Sungei Sunyi.

I don't remember any hesitation or scruple. I unfolded it and read it at once, certain that it must be from Andrew.

Saturday

No, I can't see you, Nona. Ever again. You were the one who changed my mind about trusting people; because of you I gave up living strictly for myself and by myself. And then you were the one who changed my mind back again. For two years I'd thought I could trust, that I was trusted, and then I found out that you'd never meant any of it. I had been right all along. So there wouldn't be any point in our meeting again, or in my answering any more letters from you. A.

I had only begun to think about the letter and what it could tell me when a slight draught blew it from my hand up into my face. I looked up, and the small bedroom door was open and Nona stood there in Zella's nightdress, looking at me.

I WAS on my feet. My mouth was open to say something, I don't know what, when I found myself hesitating. There was an unreal look about her, and her eyes weren't on me or the letter—a dreamy look.

Then I understood. She was walking in her sleep.

As she came walking past me I took her arm gently, and she leaned

against me and let me steer her back towards the bedroom. She said something, but I couldn't catch the words the first time. Then she said it again.

"I'm lost, Andrew. I'm lost."

It was the first time in my life I'd ever seen anyone dream-walking, and the eeriness of it had chilled me, but eavesdropping on her dream talk with Andrew was an experience close to horror. All the haunted apprehension had gone out of her voice. In her dream she was back with what for her was reality, the presence of the man she loved, or had loved, and his strong reassurance.

At the bedside I turned her pillow and said, "There you are. Just lie down and you'll be all right." And she sank on to the bed as if infinitely comforted. For me her dream had been a little nightmare. I hoped with all my heart that Andrew was dead, because I knew now I wanted her for my wife, and something told me she would never be mine as long as Andrew lived. If he still lived

I went back and read his letter again. I needed to know when it had been written and where it had been sent from, but there wasn't much evidence of either—no envelope, no date or address. And though the sheet of good bond paper was almost split at the creases, couldn't that perhaps have been the result of repeated unfoldings and readings within a short time? Couldn't it conceivably have been received any time between three years and three days ago?

I knew that she and Andrew had parted at least eight months ago because she had begun working for the B.B.C. in July of the previous year. This letter implied some sort of showdown and separation, in the past—and not, it seemed to me, the recent past. Each time I read the miserable thing my suspicion grew that Nona might have received it since she had reached Singapore a few days before.

The telephone bell rang, and Zella came in with an apron round her gold linen dress and knelt down to answer it as she always did.

"Yes." Her eyes turned towards me in a question I couldn't interpret. "Yes, he's just called on me. Just a moment." With her hand over the mouthpiece she said, "For you."

"Mr. Avery?" a familiar furry voice purred. "You weren't in at your hotel, and there is a lady who wants to speak to you urgently. I happened to see you with Miss Graham at lunch yesterday, so I thought of

asking her. A lucky inspiration, wasn't it? Well, here is the urgent message."

A blank second, and then a sweet, breathy voice saying, "Uncle Robert? Are you there, Uncle Robert?"

"Yes, Sophie," I said.

She came through rather incoherently. "Uncle Robert, you didn't know today was my birthday and I didn't tell you because people sometimes think you are only thinking about presents when your birthday is coming close. But please don't think anything about a present, only please will you come to my party this afternoon?"

I said, "Well, now——"

"Oh, *please*. Daddy says men won't like iced cakes or ice-cream, but you can have whisky or whatever you like. I do want you to come, because Angela had four men at her party and I've only got two."

I said, "How nice of you to ask me. Well—yes, I'd love to come. What time, Sophie?"

"Can you come at half past four?"

I said yes, and after a little rather charming flattery she rang off. Zella had watched me all the time.

"A birthday party," I explained. "One of the little girls—quite a charmer in her way. I'm going."

Zella said, "I'm doing a *Coquille St. Jacques* for lunch. Will that be a good foundation for jelly and toffee apples?"

"Sophie says I can have whisky instead," I told her.

SOPHIE MET me at the gate with the dog Trusty.

"Oh, Uncle Robert, I'm so glad! Now all my friends are here."

"Ah, good afternoon!" Her father came padding up to offer a hand like a warm muffin. When the hand transferred itself to my shoulder as we moved towards the house I felt a shrinking of nerve ends. "My wife is anxious to meet you. Come along."

Isabel Aragon was very much what I had expected, the pretty Eurasian girl with big, soft eyes, who had grown comfortably stout in middle age. There was a genuine simplicity and good-heartedness about her that was warmly attractive. She said, "It's good of you to come, Mr. Avery. Sophie's so fond of you."

"So is somebody else," purred Aragon, and I felt a tug at my knee.

Young Marcos was down there, spruce in a white party suit, holding up tiny pink hands in welcome. I lifted him in my arms, and a smile of bliss transformed his face. There were about a dozen children there, mostly girls of Sophie's age, with a couple of self-conscious boys and a young Eurasian who I gathered was a relative of Mrs. Aragon's.

They were just sitting down to a large spread of juvenile party food on a terrace shaded by a blue-striped sun blind, and I heard Sophie saying urgently to one of the small boys, "No, not those sandwiches. They're Uncle Robert's. You wouldn't like them anyway, because they're sour."

I was given these sandwiches, which proved to be Gentleman's Relish, a moment later, together with a whisky and soda. Young Marcos was taken from me, under protest, and consoled with a pink biscuit, and his father, after handing round plates of chocolate mousse and whipped cream, sank into a rattan chair at my side.

"I've something to tell you," I said. There was no need to lower my voice amid the chorus of child voices. "Last night, soon after I got your letter, somebody slugged me. When I came to, your letter wasn't in my pocket."

He turned slowly to stare at me and then, saying nothing, turned away to stare at his children. I wondered whether it was his death sentence that he had just heard from me, and whether he was wondering that too.

I waited for a reply, but he said nothing, so I reminded him, "If this brings trouble for you, it's only what you've brought on yourself."

He turned then to ask, "How do you make that out, Mr. Avery?"

"There's somebody trying to stop me finding Andrew, or finding out what happened to him. You say you know it all, but you won't help."

"But I will help," he said, his eyes swerving lazily to meet mine. "Only not for nothing. Yes, I know, Mr. Avery. You want my information for nothing."

I let my hate show. I stared hard down into his soft milk-chocolate-coloured eyes. "Aragon, is he alive or dead? You can tell me that much."

He offered me another sandwich. "Oh, I could tell you that much. But how much good would the bare answer do you?"



"Is he alive or dead?" I repeated.

He met my gaze frankly. "Andrew Avery is dead. But the circumstances of his death—they are what you need to know, aren't they?"

I said, experimenting boldly, "This morning I read a letter from Andrew Avery, written within the past ten days."

He only said, "That is impossible, and I fancy you know it."

I asked, "Why should I believe you?"

"Because I know," he said simply, shrugging a fat shoulder inside his shantung jacket and turning to speak in French to a small, timid girl over to his right.

I gulped my Scotch impatiently. The children were being rounded up and prepared for an excursion by private bus. They went off, leaving only Aragon and young Marcos and the amah, who came to take the little boy away as night began its swift swoop on the island.

"Let's go inside," Aragon said, taking up the tray of Scotch, ice and



soda, and we went into the long room where I had first met him. He disappeared through the bead curtain for a few moments and returned with a fresh bottle of Vat 69. He was good at stalling.

I said, "The fellow who tried to get me last night—and the night before—isn't just having fun. He'll make another bid to get me, and now he's read your letter he'll be working out an exit for you. We're in the same boat. Shouldn't we pool resources?"

I didn't expect a useful response. As I spoke I'd been working it out that I'd have to do something to Marcos Aragon. He had the information, and I had to have it too. Without delay, tonight, I was going to have to make him talk at last.

He had turned away, frowning, not listening. I said, "There's something burning."

"I was thinking the same," he said.

Marcos Aragon heaved himself to his feet and switched on a lamp

shaded in yellow raffia by my chair. Beyond the window the garden was falling from twilight into darkness.

He raised his head, sniffing suspiciously. The smell of burning had grown stronger. Muttering and frowning, he went out through the bead curtain. The dog was barking now behind a closed door somewhere.

Inside fifteen seconds Aragon was back. He said something breathlessly, and I jumped up from my chair to follow him through the curtain.

A thin cloud of smoke was leaking through a half-open door near the back of the house. There was a sound like wind in a cottage chimney and a faint crackling. Aragon's soft muffin hand gripped my biceps.

"*Marcos!*" He was coughing with the smoke in his throat and the emotion that shook his jowls. "His room's on fire!"

When I went through the smoke I found a curving staircase beyond the doorway. Half of it was in flames. I went back to Aragon.

"Get a ladder," I snapped. "And call the fire brigade, for God's sake."

Seconds were leaking away, and he stood there like an idiot. I dashed back to make a second assay of the chances of darting through the flames. Would the burning stairs bear my hundred and fifty pounds? They surely wouldn't bear Aragon's two hundred and fifty.

I took a deep breath and dived through the door. On the bottom step I paused a moment, staring through the smoke at the sparks and little flame tongues up one side of the curving stairway, and suddenly there was the awful bursting pain at the back of my head and I went down in the smoke into engulfing blackness.

With my final flicker of consciousness I realized at last what was happening to me.

ARAGON had used his child as bait, and I had walked into the trap, to be slugged and left to burn. For his third murder attempt on me Aragon had resolved to do the job himself, not to risk another fiasco at the bungling hands of bought or blackmailed thugs.

Only this was another fiasco.

It was the dog. I came back to consciousness with a bang, like a deep diver surfacing head and shoulders out of the ocean. My left arm was in agony, my head was a roaring, cavernous ache, and there was a savage tearing at the clothes at my throat. It was the dog Trusty, working like a fiend to drag me back through the doorway. He had got me a couple

of yards back, so that my head was outside the doorway and a draught from the front part of the house had revived my smoke-choked lungs.

Then Aragon was there.

"Trusty!" The shout was mad with fury, and the big dog let me go and stared over my head in shock and bewilderment. And then the whine of the heavy club through the air and the brutal, cracking blow across the yellow skull. The club cracked down on my right shoulder twice, and the third time it glanced my head. There wasn't a fourth. The bell of the fire engine sounded outside in a swift crescendo, and I heard excited voices and footsteps. Consciousness flickered on and off, like a lighthouse beam, perhaps in rhythm with my heavy breathing. I was lifted up and taken out to a long chair on the terrace.

I lay there, safe and bringing my bruised mind to painful focus on the next step. I knew my enemy and I need no longer scruple over the methods to be used in forcing Andrew's story out of him. I sat up shakily and looked round me. There seemed about twenty people in and around the house. The amah stood at the door of the pavilion across the sweep of lawn, with young Marcos in her arms. The fire had never come near him; his father had seen to that. Aragon himself wasn't in sight.

Standing helped me. It made my head swim, but it required an effort, and that's what was needed to stiffen me. I turned my head and saw Aragon in the shadow of a clump of palms. I could see he was afraid. The last time I'd seen him he had been afraid too, because he wasn't an active killer, and the emergency job he'd had to do on me had taken all the nerve he had. Perhaps he'd never murdered before; perhaps he'd always bought his murders ready-made.

As soon as he saw me step towards him he took a quick pace back towards the drive. I was none too steady on my feet, but I broke into a stumbling stride. A great cloud of smoke and steam from the hoses came between us, and when I got through it he was falling back behind the wheel of his Buick.

I got my hand on one of the door handles and wrenched it open, but the car shot forward as if snatched out of my hand, and I fell on my face. The garden was swarming with people, but all eyes were focused on the expiring blaze, and I don't believe anybody saw Aragon's escape and my stumbling pursuit.

There was nothing for it but to take a car that had been left with the key in the ignition when its owner had dashed in to help at the fire. Before a minute had gone by I was within five yards of Aragon's tail-light.

I stayed there for almost half an hour. By then I was quite lost. I don't know Singapore island outside the main business and residential areas of the city, and Aragon had driven in a bewildering sequence of directions.

The night was dark. Every time we passed through an avenue of vividly lit shop-houses that marked a Chinese village, the darkness at the far end seemed to gulp us in like a drain. I was tired, driving carelessly, and when Aragon braked sharply and pulled up near a couple of huts in darkness down a short, narrow track I jerked out of a half-dream too late to avoid his rear bumper. He was out of his car already, shouting, "Ho Fung! Ho Fung!"

No light appeared in either of the two huts, but in the beam of my headlights a door opened an inch. Aragon lumbered towards it, shouting in Chinese, "Your knife! Your knife!"

There was a moment in which nothing happened, and then a short, thickset Chinese in crumpled slacks and singlet slipped out through the door. I had seen him before. He was the man who had pushed me into the monsoon drain opposite Compton's. There was a short knife in his left hand.

I could smell the sea. I could hear it, too—close by. I could have turned the car and got away, but I had to stay and settle with Aragon. There had to be a decision that night.

As soon as I saw the thug Ho Fung moving swiftly through the beam of the headlights, I slid out of the door on the opposite side. Away from the lights, I saw ahead the dull gleam of water and a little wooden jetty beyond the huts and a couple of fishing boats moored or anchored there.

With a last breathless shout, Aragon retired into cover behind a dadap hedge. I set a course towards the near end of the huts and then behind them, over uneven ground booby-trapped with thorns and pot-holes. My hands were empty.

I fell, but as I got up again I saw Aragon's head and shoulders moving against the dull screen of the calm, dark water. He was down by the jetty, and I made my way down to him, coming up behind a small hut

or boat-house, my hands groping for a weapon of some kind. I found a heavy club leaning against the hut, but as I took it up a loud rattling noise shattered the silence: it was attached to a length of chain, which fell clanking down a slope as I disturbed it.

Whether I heard the Chinese with the knife I don't know, but I became aware of him suddenly and spun round, both hands empty again and my heart half choking me with fear. Something gave way under my right foot, and I stumbled against him and fell into a pile of old baskets smelling of dried fish, cracking my head against the corner post of the hut and greying out for an instant.

He was standing astride me then, and I was on my back, pressing myself into the creaking confusion of baskets as the knife hung in silhouette against the starshine. The blade was spear-shaped but short, with a double edge, apparently, and the long left hand held it absolutely motionless, pointing down at my throat. I had the wit to fall back like a corpse, as though I was still quite out.

I waited helplessly for the swift stab, either a single expert one or savagely repeated plunges of the blade to ensure a quick death. Instead of that, the thug started talking in stiff, grating chains of monosyllables, and Aragon, somewhere behind me and out of sight, answered. I caught a word I knew, several times repeated—the word for “hundred.”

It was a dispute about the price of murder. The thug was letting me live a little longer while he bargained for a bigger fee. Aragon stepped forward, and for a minute or more the wrangle went on in the echoing moonlight till at last the thug spat fiercely down at my throat and thrust the knife into Aragon's hand. Aragon gave an impatient exclamation and bent over me. My head and shoulders lay in the deep shadow of the hut, and I could keep my eyes slit-open safely while he blinked down at me, holding his breath, the hand stiffening round the knife shaft.

I was absolutely certain, somehow, that he wouldn't be able to do it. His shaky nerve was as unmistakable as if it had been a strong odour. His meanness was fighting a tough battle with his squeamishness, and I backed his squeamishness to win. My head was clearing, and panic was lifting. The knife in Aragon's big baby hand was not the nightmare it had been in the taut Chinese fist.

By the time Aragon gave in and straightened up to hand back the knife, I was ready. A few milliseconds before the thug's left hand would

have closed round the shaft, my hands seized his right ankle and I sprang to my feet, managing to keep the ankle firm in my left hand. He was easy to throw, and as he landed I kicked—a pretty vile sort of kick which tied him in a tight, heaving knot. The knife had fallen. I beat Aragon to it and, with its point pricking a hole in his sweat-sodden shantung shirt at heart level, forced him back until he lay flat and gasping on the jetty in the moonlight.

“Now,” I said, “I want it all.”

He was shaking, and his fat lips were wet. I could feel the warmth of his fat as I bent over him. He didn’t say anything. It was as if he hadn’t heard me speak.

“I don’t like knifing, either,” I said, “but my guts are stronger than yours. I can do it if need be, and by God I’m going to, Aragon, if you don’t give me all you know about my cousin Andrew.”

Aragon’s lips didn’t move; his eyes were fixed in a mad stare. A few yards away, the thug was still writhing.

I snarled at Aragon, “Can’t you see I mean it, you bloody fool!” and to jolt him out of his idiot stare I drew a line round his fat throat with the knife’s point. The line was red, I suppose, but looked black in the moonlight, and a large drop of black blood oozed from the end of the line under his right ear.

“Now!” I snapped.

But all that happened was a sudden calm. The hot body stopped its trembling, the protruding eyes lost their wild focus, and the round head slumped slowly to one side. He had fainted.

In a fury I slapped his great soft cheek. The sound was sharp and violent in the moonlight, but it had no effect. There was a bucket on the jetty edge. I went down the crazy old steps and filled it with the gently rocking water. The whole lot, dashed over the puffy face, failed to revive him.

Then I suspected. Under my hand, flattened on his chest, there was not the smallest vibration. I had killed a man, and for nothing. The tiny red scratch round his throat had been too much for his weak nerve and his fatty-degenerate heart.

I stood back and cursed the shapeless corpse with a bitter, exhausted fury.

There was nothing to do but go back to Nona.

Chapter Five

YOU GET a glimpse of the Sungei Sunyi Rubber Estate five miles before you come to it. Soon after you've crossed a two-thousand-four-hundred-foot mountain pass there's a break, just for fifteen yards, in the jungle that encloses the road—the result, I suppose, of a large-scale landslide—and you can see for ten miles up the valley of the Sunyi River. *Sungei Sunyi*—Lonely River.

It seemed now, as Sam Chester pulled up to light his pipe and I looked across the sunlit, crinkled jungle slopes towards Sungei Sunyi, that something important was happening to me. I'm unwilling to entertain the idea that I was touched by a premonition, but for one reason or another I became tense and excited.

In the back of the comfortable Studebaker, Winnie was saying to Nona, "You just can't see the bungalow." She sounded, with her serene, understanding voice, as if she were forgiving the contours for sinking the bungalow a fraction below the line of vision. "But you can see Eight Division."

Pale, but putting on a good performance as an interested tourist, Nona asked for the eighth division of the estate to be identified. Winnie was good for her. She had the same value as a conspicuously brave soldier has for comrades whose morale is sinking under prolonged strain. As soon as I'd got back to Zella's flat after Aragon died, I had decided to accept the Chesters' invitation to Sungei Sunyi. I'd rung the Raffles Hotel and found that they were leaving early in the morning. This was the second morning, after a night on a plantation near Rawang managed by a crony of Sam's.

The great sky was a burning blue, and the jungle lay like a coat of green astrakhan over the hills. The air was thick and lazy with heat. A noise like the vibration of a hundred thousand overstrung nerves surrounded us, the stridulation of the jungle crickets. Behind the blind-folding screens of leaves were hidden tiger and elephant, tapir and honey bear and leopard, crocodile and rhino, python and cobra, gibbon and mouse deer, hornbill and bulbul, and a hundred or a thousand other unseen creatures.

During my months with the army in Malaya I had grown to love and hate the jungle as sailors grow to love and hate the sea. With the jungle only two yards away after five years of separation, a muted uneasiness and excitement came to life in me, something altogether beyond awareness of the half-million-to-one chance that stragglers from the defeated Communist terrorist army might be within range.

After a while I saw Winnie's hand go up and grasp the top of the sun-baked car door tightly, and then Chester said, "Ambush Corner. This is where they got that fellow last year."

A perfect ambush position—but then, that country was full of them—a bend, about sixty degrees, with a thirty-foot cliff overhanging the right side and a steep plunge falling below the left. Plenty of cover for the ambush party on the cliff top, and a view along half a mile of the approach.

"Car dived down there, got wedged in the undergrowth and burnt out," Sam Chester went on, flicking a large thumb left. "Now, Winnie, it was all a year ago, before we came, and the only incident up this way for two years; so stop tensing yourself up."

But now, as we left the bend behind, I recognized the road and exclaimed in sudden excitement, "Andrew's tunnel!" The recognition of the landmark after almost twenty years was oddly moving. As I turned back to stare up the deep stream bed which had been the entrance to the track leading to Andrew's cave and jungle hide-out, I saw again two oddly contrasted figures making their way along it, two children forced by their isolation into companionship despite differences in age and temperament. Andrew's impulsive charm and his naked selfishness came echoing back.

"Now you can remember, I expect," I heard Winnie say and looked up to see the bridge over the Sunyi and bits of the last mile of the road showing through the military parade of ten thousand rubber trees, with the white bungalow on its steep hillock at the end of it. I did remember, and again I was moved. It was long and low, the bungalow my uncle had built, white-walled with a roof of curled scarlet tiles and a row of white pillars along the great part of its facade, like the stems of the royal palms that formed a short avenue from the entrance gates.

As soon as I'd moved myself into the same small room I'd slept in before, and washed, Winnie called us out to the veranda. There was a

police Land-Rover parked in the shade of a palm clump, and an officer with an R.A.F. moustache and fierce green eyes was saying appreciatively, "We told Winnie to be sure and bring us back something nice from Singapore, Miss Nicolas, and Winnie never lets you down."

Nona looked better already. I resented the easy way she took the police lieutenant's too obvious tribute, but explained it to myself as relief at being with somebody who didn't remind her of Andrew, who wasn't a threat to the secret she defended so stubbornly.

Sam Chester introduced me to the policeman, whose name was Waring. He hardly took his green eyes off Nona as he shook hands, but five minutes later, when Winnie led Nona away, he turned to me with a little frown of recollection.

"I'm sorry, I never listen properly to names when I'm introduced. But didn't Chester say your name was Avery?"

I said yes.*

"No relation, I suppose, to the fellow who was killed in the ambush down the road last year," he said.

Excitement shot through me like a thousand-volt shock. I heard myself asking, "Why, what was his name?"

He frowned again. "Angus? No, Andrew. Andrew Avery."

Just like that.

I said to Waring, "I'm his cousin. I came East to find out whether he was alive or dead."

Waring stroked the ends of his coppery moustache upward. "But his wife was informed. I'm sure she was, though she didn't come to the funeral. You never heard from her?"

I said no. "None of his family knew his wife. We hadn't seen him for years."

"I see. Well, we merely informed his wife in Singapore and left the rest to the other fellow."

I asked which other fellow.

"The one who was in the ambush with him and got clear. Now, what was his name?"

On an impulse I suggested, "Lyle, was it?"

"That's right, Lyle," he said at once, but some variation in the pronunciation made me inquire, "Or Lyall?"

He nodded and spelt the name. "Malcolm Lyall. You know him?"

I said, "I know nothing at all. It would help me a lot if we could go through the whole thing."

Winnie and Nona were coming back to the veranda. "Come back with me when I leave," he offered, and turned away, drawn to Nona's beauty like a flower to the sun. But soon she excused herself and turned back into the house.

Seven minutes later I was passing, for the second time that day, beneath the jungle-smothered cliff top on which Andrew's killers had lain in ambush. I said, staring up at the black skyline of leaves, "He hadn't much chance, driving into that."

Waring snapped a glance upward. "Not much. He died easy, all the same. One round through his eye and another through his chest before the car caught fire. Lyall burnt himself badly trying to drag him out when the car was blazing down that slope there; but he'd been dead for a minute or more by then."

"Tougher for him than for Andrew," I said, as we left the bend behind us. Then I asked, "Is Lyall in Malaya?"

"No, but not far away. Over in Sumatra, not very far from Medan, I believe. We must have his address at the station."

A few minutes later we were at the station, a long wooden building on stone piles, with a veranda running all round it and apron fences of barbed wire isolating it from the small village. On the wall six dirty khaki uniform caps, Japanese style, with the red five-pointed Communist star above the peak, were set in a circle round a faded red flag. Pointing to one of the trophy caps, Waring said, "Belonged to one of the party who ambushed your cousin. One of those Japanese rifles, too." And he pointed to a junk-shop collection of weapons stacked in a corner.

"You mean Lyall got one of them?" I asked him.

"Winged one, anyway. He returned their fire. I don't suppose he'd have got away with it, if——" He interrupted himself there and said, "But I'll give you the story as it happened."

"They were in your cousin's car, an old Morris Ten, on their way to see the then manager of Droga Besar Estate, thirty miles north of here. Lyall is a South African, very nice fellow. He'd just inherited a small group of estates from an uncle of his, rubber plantations in North

Borneo and larger mixed estates over in Sumatra. He'd never set foot in Asia, didn't know a rubber tree from a mistletoe bough. In Singapore he met your cousin and his wife, and they were soon friends. Lyall was looking round for a right-hand man, somebody with experience who could take full responsibility until he'd come by some experience for himself, and your cousin had recommended the manager of Droga Besar, fellow called Hargreaves. Well, they drove up from Singapore, spent the night at Ulu Maias Rest House, and made an early start. They ran into the ambush soon after ten hundred hours."

"You were here at the time?"

"Yes—first on the scene after the action. The terrorists had cleared off by then, or they did as soon as they saw us arrive. There was that cap and that old rifle and a few leaves spattered with blood under the little sun shelter they'd made on the edge of the bluff by drawing together a few branches overhead. The troops from Droga came down with their trackers before noon, but they couldn't find the party's line of withdrawal before the afternoon rains started, so the follow-up came to nothing. Your cousin was buried at Ipoh. Naturally I imagined his wife would have let his family know."

I thought of Nona, of the shock of Lyall's news. Outside, some of the constables were playing basket-ball, and beyond them the sun was beginning its swift fall towards the western skyline. "We'd none of us seen him for years," I said. "He went his own way."

Waring was surreptitiously reading a letter that lay open on his desk. "I mustn't keep you," I said. "You said you could find Lyall's address, though."

He found it after a search—a place called Kidumai, between twenty and thirty miles from Medan, in Sumatra. "I might as well go across and see him," I said. It would be as well to have some sort of document signed by Lyall among those I took home to establish the fact of death.

Waring nodded. "You'll like him." He got up and dismissed it all. "Well, I hope Miss Nicolas will be well enough to come down to the dance on Saturday. But I'll be seeing her before then, I expect."

I merely said, "How d'vou send a cable from here?"

He fixed me up with a telephone and I drafted the message to Uncle Max: CONFIRMATION ANDREW'S DEATH APRIL LAST YEAR COLLECTING DOCUMENTS ROBERT.

But I knew there was something more. There had to be.

Back at the house, I told Nona that I was going to Medan for a couple of nights.

"To Medan!" I wasn't able to meet her eyes because I knew things she didn't know I knew.

The next morning Sam took me in the estate car to Ipoh, where I had booked on the plane to Medan.

THE COAST of Sumatra was frying under the grilling yellow sky, without the usual sea breeze to soften the hammer blows. Lyall's house was a handsome old Dutch bungalow with a magnificent blue background of mountain and a foreground of young green rice fields. I hadn't sent a telegram announcing my visit, having left it till too late at the airfield, so I was unexpected.

It was past eleven in the morning, after visa complications and a night en route in Medan, when I reached the place. Just the sort of beautiful Sumatran girl you'd expect to find in the backwoods house of a European bachelor came in to the veranda and told me that Tuan Lail had spent the night in Medan and wouldn't be back until sunset. In the thwarted pause that followed this announcement she invited me to lunch and a siesta in the house.

I waited. The lunch was good, and afterwards I took my first siesta for more than a week in a large bare guest-room. The girl had laid out a green silk sarong for me and high wooden bathing clogs and a towel. When I asked her her name she answered, "Kuwadi."

Lyall came in soon after five, when I'd drunk three cups of good coffee and eaten a couple of the little sweet things Kuwadi brought with it. I heard the car pull up and looked over the veranda rail to see a tall man getting out of a big American station



wagon. He came up the steps, looking hot and tired, and when Kuwadi stepped silently forward on her pretty bare feet with the obvious message that he had a visitor, there was no mistaking the silent curse his lips formed. From feeling welcome I suddenly felt unwelcome.

He came towards me, blinking handsome dark-brown eyes and dropping a bundle of mail into a chair on the way. I got up and said, "Sorry to crash in without warning. I'm Robert Avery."

He shook my hand doubtfully, and I noticed that the fingers of his right hand were half contracted into a clawlike gesture—the legacy, I remembered, of his effort to drag Andrew from the blazing car. Blinking the almost black eyes again, he said, after a pause, "D'you mean you're one of Andrew's family?"

"A cousin," I told him.

His good-looking face expressed what I took to be a rather remote sympathy—as well it might—until I explained that in England none of us had known of his death and I'd come East to find him.

He said, "I never realized he was that interesting to his relatives. Didn't he tell me they'd washed their hands of him?"

Despite his cool welcome, I felt attracted to him. He was a fine-looking man with a proud, square face, brilliant black hair, and strong brown limbs revealed by his short-sleeved shirt and khaki shorts.

I said, "We'd hardly ever met him, most of us. I had, actually, when I was just a kid. It's a matter of a will now. We need to have proof of his death before any of the rest of us can inherit his aunt's money."

He said, "I thought he told me he had a rich aunt in England but that she'd cut him out of her will."

"She did, but later on she changed her mind."

He had half sunk into a long cane chair when he frowned down at his grubby hands and creased shorts. "D'you mind if I take a shower and change?" he asked, getting up again. "You'll be staying the night, of course. Just call for anything you want."

He was soon back, in a cream shirt and blue slacks, his black hair damp from the shower. He lit a cigarette and said, "Yes, Andrew believed his aunt had cut him adrift for keeps. About the time that I met him first, that was."

I explained about Aunt Julia's last will, and the nature of my mission. "Two days ago I heard about the ambush at Sungei Sunyi," I told him,

"so I've come over to ask you to let me have a written statement, the sort of thing I can forward to my aunt's lawyers with the police statement and certificates."

"Of course," he said, pouring himself a brandy and ginger ale.

"How long was it you knew Andrew?" I had come to have an unquenchable curiosity about Andrew, and here was one of the very few sources of information.

"Just ten weeks," he told me. "When I came from South Africa there was nobody I knew in the whole continent of Asia, but a friend at home had given me an introduction to Andrew. We made friends, and he did a lot for me."

"You got on well with him, then?" I queried.

He gave a short, attractive smile. "Most of the time," he said. "He was a strong character, of course."

"A bit bloody-minded, I understood."

The black brows rose above the dark eyes. "I wouldn't have said so. Whose word have you taken for that?"

"Nobody's. He was a bully to me when I stayed with his father for two months."

"But weren't you children then?"

"Children can be cruel," I pointed out. "A child of sixteen who's cruel isn't likely to change much later on." But Lyall wouldn't accept that.

"H'm. Well, I was his friend and I can only say he didn't seem like that to me. I found him—well, a better man than most."

I felt then, for the first time, that there was some reserve behind his words, a tinge of falsity in the pleasant voice. I suspected that I wasn't getting the whole story, and I recognized again a definite suspicion that I hadn't yet come to the end of my search for the truth about Andrew.

I said, "His wife doesn't seem to have found him a very satisfactory husband."

I saw him stiffen at that, and it was a moment before he answered me. "His wife? You know his wife?"

I said yes.

"Aren't marriages always pretty difficult for outsiders to judge?" It was a reasonable thing to say, but I felt it was a closely guarded reply.

"I suppose so. You know her, too, of course."

He threw his cigarette over the veranda rail. It flew off like a swift,



determined fire-fly. "I knew her," he said. "She was beautiful," he added inconsequentially in a day-dreaming tone.

"She is," I agreed.

"But——" He sighed. "Oh, well, I suppose there may have been faults on his side as well."

"Meaning that most of the faults must have been hers?"

His hands, the strong left one and the contracted right one, rose in a small gesture of protest. "Nona may have been utterly faultless for all I know. You've evidently made up your mind that she was. Nona was—well, the wife of a friend of mine. Quite honestly, I'm not very happy to be discussing her."

I was puzzled. Now nothing rang quite true—or was I indulging in an amateur playwright's weakness for detecting dramatic stresses and riddles in quite normal behaviour? Accepting a pink gin, I was glad of the dark because I was confused and uneasy. This man Lyall seemed to be offering me a challenge every time he spoke, and I had an unaccountable feeling of being outclassed.

"Hello!" Lyall had leaned forward. "Another visitor."

Up the side road to the bungalow the headlights of a car were advancing, weaving left and right along the mud track, jogging up and down in the pot-holes and ruts gouged out by recent rains. I wasn't ungrateful at having an uneasy conversation interrupted.

The car drew up at the foot of the wooden steps. There was a pause, and then a door opened and a woman stepped out and came hurriedly up the steps, her beautiful figure silhouetted against the pool of radiance formed by the headlights. Then the car drove off.

Malcolm Lyall's sandalled feet swung down to the floor. We recognized her in the same instant, but only he exclaimed aloud. "Nona!"

SHE WAS pale and breathless, and her hair was in disorder. As Lyall clicked on the lights she halted like a small snared beast, and her right hand went up to her throat. She had seen me, but she stared at Lyall. She didn't say anything, just stared at him.

We stood there, frozen still and silent, like a broken-down movie, until Lyall said, "You know Robert Avery, don't you?"

Her light-brown eyes, that had been locked to Lyall's dark-brown ones, turned my way for a moment, and I wanted desperately to understand

and respond, but I was baffled. Then she was facing Lyall again. She still hadn't spoken.

I was trying not to admit that it looked as if they knew each other well, those two.

Malcolm Lyall's voice was harsh as he spoke again. "It used to be vermouth and soda, or am I forgetting?" He was at the drink cabinet, turning over a glass, his back to us.

"I don't want anything," Nona said. She met my eyes for a moment, then turned away. I pushed a chair forward, and she sank into it, setting her big raffia handbag on the floor beside her.

"Well, it's nice to see you, Nona," Lyall said, deliberately drawling and looking at her over his shoulder. "I can't honestly say you're looking fine but—it's nice to see you."

She seemed a thousand miles away from me, but in some disturbing way she seemed close to Lyall, as if they were understanding each other without a word spoken, as if I were an intruder. As for me, I was holding on to my glass as if it were a life-line, my mind crowded with ugly shadows.

Lyall came back and sat down. "Robert Avery's come over to get some details about Andrew," he said. "He's just learned that he's come into a fortune—Andrew's money. Andrew's ill wind has blown him a lot of good." His voice had changed. It was brittle and self-conscious. "He only heard about the ambush a day or two ago. Does that mean you never let Andrew's family know?"

She had found a little more assurance. "I didn't know any of them. Andrew said he was finished with them, and he never talked about them, ever."

"Robert had no use for him, anyway."

She didn't say anything.

"In fact, I seem to have been chief mourner," Lyall went on, his eyes challenging her. He was trying to provoke her into saying something, but she wouldn't speak. "Only mourner, maybe."

I stood up. I said, "I'll take a shower, I think," and left them.

THE NIGHT was hotter than in either Singapore or Sungei Sunyi, but it wasn't the thick, heavy heat of the darkness that kept me awake. We had all gone to bed at ten o'clock, but the luminous hands of my watch

showed half past midnight, and sleep was far away. It was cooler to stand by my window, feeling the slight stirring of air that came up through the louvers of the shutters with the wan reflected moonlight. Standing there I knew that inside the house someone was moving. Someone had crept past in the corridor.

My door opened soundlessly as I lifted the latch. I put one eye to the inch-wide crack and stared down the corridor. It was Nona.

She passed out of sight round a corner, and I followed swiftly on bare feet, thinking that once again she was walking in her sleep. At the corner, though, I halted sharply.

She was at the door of Malcolm Lyall's room. Lifting the latch softly—calling a whispered word into the darkness, and then stepping softly inside. The door closed, and now nothing could stop me from tiptoeing towards it and pausing outside, holding my breath and listening. I heard low voices, hers and his, but it wasn't possible to distinguish words. I felt sick and somehow afraid.

I turned away and plunged back into my room. Standing in the middle of the floor, I let the shock tear through me, surrendering myself to it for a few moments, not thinking, only feeling. Slowly then, several ugly thoughts came crawling out of cover.

That ambush . . . There had been one or two odd things about the ambush. It was odd to be ambushed on that road, to start with—the only ambush in more than two years. It was a quiet area, Sungei Sunyi, white on the operational maps, signifying free of terrorist aggression. But Andrew had been ambushed and killed there.

Then there was the question of a target. Terrorists were often cowards but not very often fools. They ambushed for two reasons: the first to capture arms and ammunition, the second to murder key figures in the war against Communist terrorism—police officers, rubber-estate managers, and such-like. But in this case there were just two civilians they couldn't possibly have identified, in an old civilian car, with nothing in it for them beyond the possibility of capturing a couple of almost useless pistols or perhaps a rifle. It didn't make sense.

Another thing: I had been told that Iban Army trackers had been on the scene shortly after and they'd failed to find the ambush party's approach or withdrawal routes. Now that, to anyone who had worked with those fine boys from Borneo, just didn't ring true.

So what did it all add up to? This: I didn't believe in that ambush any more. I didn't believe any real terrorists had ever waited on top of that cliff and opened fire on Andrew's car.

So what *had* happened?

I believed, now, that this had happened: Just short of that bend Lyall had asked Andrew to stop the car for some reason. He'd got out then, with a gun of some kind, and from a certain distance he'd turned and shot Andrew twice, once through the heart, once through the eye. And it was something he'd planned ahead. He had the props ready to mount a fake ambush. He'd got up the cliff and planted a terrorist cap, the old Japanese rifle, and the spent rounds from his own rifle and a few splashes of blood (his own or Andrew's, never mind whose) on conspicuous leaves, trampled about a bit, and finally tied a few branches and creeper together to form a shaded look-out position.

Then—standing on the running board, pushing down the hand throttle, kicking in the clutch, and running the old car to the road edge and letting her go over the drop, following to start a fire if one didn't break out naturally. And then the wait for the first of those who'd heard the distant outbreak of firing, the run down to the flaming wreck to be found making a gallant attempt to save the friend he hadn't realized was already dead. And there he'd done a really thorough job, getting more than he'd bargained for, a maimed hand for the rest of his life.

That was how it had happened. It must be. And the motive?

The motive had just been thrown at me, hard. Lyall was a killer; he'd killed Andrew to possess Andrew's wife, the old savage story. And Andrew's wife? I shied away from that, passionately.

I WAS OUT in the veranda by six, a few minutes before the sun rose in fierce magnificence over the blue-black straits. When Lyall's step sounded along the corridor I had to signal almost every muscle in my body to relax the sudden tension that gripped them.

He looked spruce and at ease in a short-sleeved khaki shirt and slacks, and since I'd heard the tapping of a typewriter from the direction of his room I was ready for the single sheet of script, signed in green ink, which he handed me.

"I'm afraid I made no arrangement to be picked up," I said after I'd thanked him and folded the typescript. "How do I get a taxi here?"

"You don't want a taxi," he said, only his words, not his voice, expressing hospitality. "You can take the car. I've got a jeep as well here. Any time you like."

I thanked him and said I was ready whenever the driver was. He roared "Sutan!" in answer to that and frowned until a small, thin youth in a black *songkok* and an orange Hawaiian shirt came up the veranda steps, looking round him defensively. Brusquely Lyall ordered him to drive me to Medan. "Well, there's a pile of work waiting for me, I suppose," he said to me then, holding out his distorted hand. "Always the same when you take a couple of days off, isn't it?"

I had to take the twisted hand, but I didn't meet the dark mahogany eyes. By tomorrow I'd be denouncing him to Waring, who'd said, "You'll like him."

"Good journey," he said in answer to my confused murmur of thanks and good-bye. "Car'll be here in a couple of minutes." And he went off, to my relief. Almost at once the blue station wagon appeared round the far end of the bungalow and pulled up at the foot of the veranda steps.

Absent-mindedly I'd unfolded the paper Lyall had given me, and absent-mindedly I found myself reading the opening paragraph:

On the morning of March 30 last year Mr. Andrew Avery and I drove from Ulu Maias Rest House, at which we'd spent the night, towards Droga to meet Mr. Ian Hargreaves, then manager of Droga Besar Estate, who had been recommended to me as a suitable general manager for the estates I had recently inherited in North Borneo and Sumatra. Mr. Avery proposed a detour via Kuala Jeroh, telling me that Sungei Sunyi, a few miles from Jeroh, had been his childhood home for three years. . . .

The chauffeur Sutan interrupted me there, reporting from the top of the veranda steps, "*Sudah, sedia, tuan.*"

I refolded the paper, took up my bag, followed him down to the car and got in beside him. We had moved forward two or three yards when a cry sounded from the bungalow. "Robert! Robert!"

Nona was running down the veranda steps. If the bungalow had been in flames she would have run out just like that. Her face was shockingly white, her pale lips desperately parted and her lower teeth gleaming through. Even after the car had stopped she went on calling, "Robert!" as if I still might not have heard. "I'm coming too," she said breathlessly when she reached the car, and her hand pulled clumsily at the door. I

let her in, and she collapsed on the seat behind me with a deep sigh and closed her eyes. Sutan drove on.

The car carried us south through village markets and green landscapes of rice and occasional plantations of rubber and tobacco. I sat there like two men, one of them shrinking from a woman who wasn't much better than a murderess, the guilty lover of her husband's murderer at least; the other agonized with love and pity for the same woman. There was nothing I could trust myself to say, so I said nothing.

By the time we reached the airfield I had decided that there just couldn't be anything in my panicky suspicion that she and Lyall had plotted Andrew's death together. There was another explanation for the whole riddle of her and her behaviour ever since I'd first met her.

She and Lyall had fallen hard for each other, and Andrew stood in the way. Lyall, the young South African new to the country, hearing about the occasional ambushes in which the terrorists still sneak-killed their enemies, had been presented with an easy method of getting his rival out of the way. The long drive over lonely jungle roads to meet Hargreaves offered a hundred opportunities for a murder that, given reasonable luck, would never be suspected.

Nona knew. After it had happened Lyall had gone down to Singapore to his friend's widow. Did he tell her or did she suspect, at once or gradually? She knew, sooner or later, at any rate, and it was that shock that had turned her into the horror-haunted creature who had made such a devastating entry into my life. She still loved Lyall crazily, but her horror of his crime had parted her from him, even though the parting was slowly killing her.

So my determination to find out what had happened to Andrew had come as another desperate shock to her. Ill and terrified, she had flown East herself in an effort to warn Lyall or head me off. And now—what?

I gave Sutan a fifty-*rupiah* note, and he carried my valise to the counter, where I was able to get Nona a return ticket.

"Thank you" were the only words she spoke to me until we were in the air over the Strait of Malacca. She said then, "Robert, I want to talk to you some time—but not now. You've been wonderful."

I was silent, simply because I couldn't think of a word to say. I had been thinking some more, revising my estimate of the situation, and my thoughts were sombre and ugly.

"You've been wonderful," she said again, her head turned away, her hands lying open helplessly. She said it as if I were an understanding sort of brother or uncle, and it maddened me. Very soon now she wasn't going to think of me as wonderful, not when I'd talked to Waring. . . .

Up there in the silent sky I worked it all out anew, every detail, finally fitting almost the last scrap of evidence into place. By the time we touched down on Malayan soil I had it all. As soon as I'd sent Uncle Max a second cable (IGNORE MY LAST STOP WRITING) I took Nona into the bar and ordered two double brandies despite her protest.

When hers was in front of her I raised my eyes miserably to her pale face and said, "So that we understand each other, Nona. I told you I'd know it all before I finished. The contact lenses fooled me yesterday, but in the past hour I've worked it all out."

She stared at me like a madwoman, tried to say something, and fainted.

HER RECOVERY was surprisingly swift. I suppose it was suspense that had been killing her: now that the worst had happened she found the reality easier to face than the shadow. I began explaining.

"Up to the time we left the ground in Medan I thought Lyall had been your lover and killed Andrew to get him out of your way. That would have explained a lot, but not all. I began thinking about Aragon, and I just couldn't fit him in. . . ."

I gave her the story, now falling into a neat synopsis in my mind.

"Aragon had attempted murder, and not only once, to stop me finding out what had happened to Andrew. But if Andrew was dead, and murdered, why would Marcos Aragon fight so hard to keep the truth from me—unless he was the murderer, and pretty obviously he wasn't. Andrew was a born moneylender's client. Nothing likelier than that Andrew had got in deep with Aragon, and of course shady moneylenders, like blackmailers, wish their clients a long life with desperate sincerity. So did Aragon know that Andrew was alive and that I was somehow a threat to Andrew's life?

"Only, if Andrew had been alive, what could have restrained him from coming forward to claim his inheritance? Something pretty powerful, obviously. If he had—well, if he'd been wanted by the police for a serious crime, then maybe he couldn't have risked revealing himself.

He'd have been hiding, either in some remote hide-out or behind an assumed name and identity.

"I assumed, for the sake of argument, that Andrew *was* alive, that he had become a fugitive from justice and lived somewhere under an assumed name, that he had been blackmailed by Aragon and that, despite his inability to claim the fortune that was his, he still controlled enough money to be able to pay Aragon large, regular sums. That of course suggested a successful crime for gain, even a murder for gain. Andrew had known somebody with money and found a safe way of murdering him and getting his hands on a good deal of the money. But who would Andrew know with a lot of money—Andrew, a man who went round the country stealing small sums from Asian shopkeepers? Well, he'd known Malcolm Lyall."

I took a swallow of brandy, still sorting out final details in my mind like a dramatist working out a plot.

"Suddenly I remembered a pretty actress who had changed her eyes from blue to brown for a colour film. In the few weeks after Andrew had murdered Lyall in that phoney ambush he must have taken a quick trip to Australia or America, maybe, and fixed himself up with some dark-brown contact lenses. The conspicuous Avery blue eyes were the most noticeable thing about him. He could be pretty sure of never meeting anybody who'd known Lyall more than very slightly, but there were numbers of people in South-East Asia who knew Andrew. He'd got hold of Lyall's passport. Perhaps it was forgetting the passport, till almost too late and then having to tear it from one of the corpse's pockets while the car blazed that burnt his hand so badly—but even that paid a dividend, because for weeks he wouldn't have been able to sign his name and when he could nobody was going to expect a firm replica of Malcolm Lyall's old signature. Anyway, he had Lyall's passport and all his private papers, and we can be sure he'd pumped the fellow dry those last weeks—of course, you must have seen him at it."

She looked up at me then. "You think I knew," she said.

And I was sure then that I didn't. "No. Not until afterwards."

She put her hands over her eyes and said, "I knew he was working out a scheme to get money out of Malcolm. He was an easy victim, Malcolm. All he really cared about was whisky. He must have been tight for quite half the two months he spent in Singapore. Andrew met him the day he

arrived from Cape Town, and he was with us night and day; he had the spare room in our flat in Orange Grove Road, and we were almost the only people he met. I suppose towards the end Andrew was taking care he didn't get known to anybody."

I nodded and went on. "Andrew would have known plenty about ambushes, and from his time as security officer in Johore he'd probably have one or two trophies of anti-terrorist action—that bandit cap and the old rifle, they'd probably have been knocking about in the boot of his car for years."

"Yes," she confirmed.

"So he was able to do a pretty good mock-up of an ambush. But he's not a born murderer, and I suppose he was in pretty grim shape when he showed up in Singapore."

Her pale hands tightened over her eyes. "I'd thought for three days he was dead, and then he came in the night, wearing Malcolm's sombrero, and his arm in a sling and his eyes so changed I didn't know him for a minute. He'd flown up to Tokyo and got those contact lenses a month *before* the ambush. He was wearing them by the time the police came on the scene there."

After a moment's pause, I said, "I wonder how Marcos Aragon found out about the ambush and got his hooks on Andrew."

Nona looked up again and said, "I've always believed Aragon put him up to it. I believe Aragon was behind it all, even perhaps engineering his first meeting with Malcolm. I think Andrew was in so deep and Aragon had such a hold that Malcolm was a doomed man before he set foot in Malaya. I know Aragon drew money from the estates."

She wasn't a riddle to me any more. Everything she'd done, from start to finish, the lies she'd told, the desperate appeal to me that day at Stagford House, the way she'd suffered Aragon's murderous attacks in silence rather than show me the way to Andrew—everything was explained. Andrew was a murderer, but he was her husband and she loved him. So what else could she have done?

I wanted to know what had happened that night in Singapore, when Andrew had come back from the dead and Nona learned what he had done. Clumsily I said, "Of course you couldn't have gone with him then. So what did you do?"

She blinked. "Do?"

"I mean, you couldn't go straight off with him, or you'd have spoiled his scheme, Mrs. Avery going off with 'Mr. Lyall.' So what did you do? Wait and marry him again under the other name?"

Her face went cold. "You think I'd live with him, after that?"

No, I hadn't really thought so, but I'd wanted to hear her say it. It had been worth shocking and hurting her to get that unmistakable response. She was staring at me with chill aversion, and the cold stare warmed me. I could take some comfort in the reassurance that Andrew's crime had placed her for ever out of his reach.

She had risen to her feet, not quite steadily, and now she excused herself for a few minutes while I bargained with a Sikh taxi-man for the fare to Sungei Sunyi.

As the taxi took us through the airport gates she turned to me and said, "I'd better tell you, Robert. There's a telegram on its way to Andrew from me. Telling him. Warning him."

As soon as we reached Sungei Sunyi that evening, Nona went to her room with Winnie and I didn't see her for twenty-four hours. I told Sam Chester the whole of it over a couple of whiskies, and in the morning I had an interview with Waring. "If you can get hold of him," I told him, "you can get a conviction on his eyes alone, the coloured contact lenses and testimony from anybody in South Africa who'd known Lyall. You won't want me as a witness, or Nona either."

I said that last with a little anxiety, because as soon as my interview with Waring was over I intended to ring B.O.A.C. for two reservations to London, the first two they could offer. But Waring didn't demur. No, the only problem was to get him into court, but Waring seemed to think there might be a way. Despite my warning him that Andrew knew by now that I had worked out the whole story, he sounded confident.

Now, driving back from my interview with Waring, I was passing the tunnel entrance to the track leading to Andrew's jungle hide-out, the scene of so much delight and terror in my eleventh year. I wondered whether I could find my way there now, through the four or ~~five~~ miles of tough going to the cave and the pool to which Andrew retired for short periods of solitary make-believe when the world wouldn't give him all his own way.

At the bungalow Winnie told me Nona had been asking for me. Her

eyes were very gentle and quietly speculative behind their glasses. I went into Nona's room—it was Andrew's old room—and smiled down at her and took a chair at the bedside, not saying anything. She was wearing a flamingo nightdress, and it looked as if Winnie had been brushing her hair. She was less pale, and her faint scent and the nearness were exciting. I waited. "I wanted to explain yesterday," she said, not looking at me. "Not that I can explain, really. I behaved as if you were an enemy. Four times you were almost killed, and if you had been it would have been because I hadn't told you what I knew."

"I didn't tell you because—because somehow you can't treat people the way they deserve. Andrew deserves the same from me as he deserves from anybody else, and maybe more. But it was impossible, Robert. I couldn't go to the police. I couldn't even tell you, not even when you were in such danger. And Andrew is bad and you are good." She turned her eyes on me. "How can I expect you to understand?" She sighed and then continued, "Men are romantic and women are practical. That's what they say. But even when I found out about Andrew, bit by bit, worse and worse, somehow I was always for him. Why?"

"Isn't that simple?" I said. "You love him and you don't love me."

She looked at me and said, "No, Robert. No."

Then something like thunder and lightning went through me and she was in my arms and her fingers were in my hair and her mouth against mine. She was half sobbing and shivering in my arms, and I was staring into a sudden future that dazzled like a searchlight.

Only . . . This had been Andrew's room and this had been Andrew's wife. He was near, somehow. He was there with us, and I could tell after a while that Nona felt it too.

Chapter Six

IT WAS after five, still dark, when Sam Chester came roaring into my room, clicking on the light and shaking my shoulder roughly through the mosquito-net.

"Robert, get up, man. Hell and all out here. Nona's gone!"

Dazed with shock, I made a frenzied, fumbling job of pulling some clothes on while Chester's deep boom echoed painfully in the small

room. "The car's gone too. One of the Home Guard sentries down in the village saw it coasting down the hill about two o'clock."

I blinked crazily at him. "She took your car?"

"No, you fool. He took her—that husband of hers, I suppose. Get moving, man! Can't you wake up?"

The fat amah, Ah Yin, came to the door then with a large bowl of coffee, which I drank while Sam filled in the story. The Home Guardsman had been astonished to see the car coasting slowly down the slope through the village with its headlights not switched on. As it passed him he saw a man at the wheel and a woman at his side. Just beyond the village the engine had started up and he saw the reflection of the headlights across the river. As soon as the bungalow staff got up to prepare for a rubber-plantation manager's early working day, he had called to ask for an explanation.

"Land-Rover's ready," Sam said as soon as I had some shoes on. "We've got to get after him. There should have been a sentry somewhere by the bridge, and he'll know which road he took."

As I swung into the Land-Rover seat beside him I said, "So he *was* there last night. Right outside the window, and we both knew, if only we'd trusted our intuitions."

Sam drove us down the hill at a speed that created a cold dawn breeze and whipped tears into my eyes. We went the first mile in silence.

"If Umbi didn't fill her up last night, there can't have been much in the tank," Sam boomed suddenly. And before he could say another word we cut a corner, and there was the car in the middle of the road. Beside it, in a thin film of mud from the early night rain, a pattern of tracks told a story—large, nailed-boot tracks and small soft ones. The small ones had run headlong to the side of the road and into the jungle, the striding large ones in pursuit.

When Sam turned the headlights that way, I saw at once the two tiny pennants of flamingo gauze, torn by fish-hook thorns from her night-dress; the torn and crushed leaves, one of them blood-stained, where the fugitive had hurled herself against the jungle barrier; the two long, stubborn grooves in the slippery wet soil where she had been dragged back by her pursuer. The larger prints then strode back down the road alone, and I fancied they were a little deeper and heavier—I knew that Nona had been carried helpless in her husband's arms. And I knew,

too, where they had gone. I didn't need to read the tracks any more.

I told Chester, "It's worse now, Sam. He's taken her into the jungle. There's a place four miles in that used to be his hide-out when he was sixteen and I stayed here. There's a cave. He's taken her there."

"He's mad," was all Sam said.

"Maybe, but what else could he do? No petrol in the car, and the nearest place along the road more than two miles ahead—and that a police station, anyway."

"He could have left Nona and made a get-away himself," Sam argued, turning the Land-Rover round in the narrow roadway.

"No. If a get-away was all he'd wanted he'd have kept out of Malaya."

"What does he want, then?"

"To play God. Jehovah. We've offended and betrayed him, Nona and I, and he can't allow us to get away with it. I know him, Sam. It's the way he is."

As we came near the tunnel entrance of the old path to Andrew's hide-out I put a hand on his arm, and he pulled up. I got out.

Yes, they'd gone in there. Of course they had. I gave only a single glance at the heavy, slipping footprints in the bank of the small stream that marked the entrance to the old route to the cave. Then I got in beside him again and said, "Take me to the bungalow, Sam, and wait while I collect some brandy and food and a gun and put on some more suitable clothes. Then drop me here and I'll start an emergency follow-up. After that you can collect Waring and a couple of trackers from the army at Droga, if you can. They can do the professional man-hunt."

He drove me in silence up the hill to the bungalow and yelled for Winnie as he cut the engine. By the time I'd changed into a pair of green canvas jungle boots and a suit of Sam's of jungle green, Winnie and the amah had fried a huge plateful of ham and eggs, and thick slices of buttered toast steamed in two racks by a pot of coffee. I ate and drank the lot in silence. When I got up, Winnie handed me a small rucksack, open so that I could see what she'd packed in it.

She'd done well. Two Fair Isle sweaters, a whole bottle of Hennessy, three plastic bags full of food, a small first-aid kit. . . . There was more, but I didn't wait to inspect it. Sam handed me a parang, a pistol and about twenty rounds, which I took without examining.

Then I was ready. At the top of the steps Winnie swept forward with

her hands up and hugged and kissed me. There were tears in her nice eyes. "Bring her back, Robert," she said. "I love you both."

I kissed her and jumped in beside Sam, who had the Land-Rover moving before my backside touched the seat. The sun, huge and smoky red, climbed over the green jungle horizon as we shot through the bungalow gates.

I was ready to leap out before the Land-Rover came to a standstill opposite the entrance to Andrew's old jungle trail, but Sam held me back and glared into my eyes. "When you find him," he said, "shoot him. Don't stop to agonize and sentimentalize about him. Shoot as soon as you sight him. If you don't he'll swallow you in one gulp."

I said, "Good-bye, Sam, and thanks." Then I put my head down and pushed into the stuffy, dark coldness of the dawn jungle.

A fine tendril hooked with almost invisible thorns tore across my lips, and I tasted blood. The patterned rubber sole of my jungle boot slipped nearly a yard down the damp clay of the stream bank, and I fell in a miniature pocket of black swamp shaded by heavy grey-green leaves like elephant ears.

From far ahead, muffled by the trees, came the wild, exultant voices of the wahwahs. These long-armed gibbons cry their bubbling chorus in the tree-tops as the sun rises, and for me this had always been one of the deepest thrills the wild could give. Even now a quiver of response ran through my nerve system. Around me the light was an unhealthy grey. The air was still rather cold, though before I'd got fifty yards in I was soaked in sweat and so was Sam's jungle-green battle dress. Every step was a fight against the creepers and thorns that caught me like traps, against the slippery earth the sun could never reach to dry.

At first there was little difficulty in picking out traces of the overgrown trail, but in fifteen minutes I was lost.

To be lost in the jungle is as bad as being adrift in a small boat in the middle of an ocean—worse, maybe. If you've never been lost in a jungle you just have no idea of how lost you can be. I tried to remember everything I'd learned in the army from my old tracker, Langgong. After a moment I turned back along my own tracks to find the last signs of the trail I had noted. If I'd gone forward I might never have found my way back.

"Langgong, help me now." And at once my eyes seemed to move to

a new focus, and I was seeing small things one at a time instead of a huge, daunting confusion. I had left a trail like a rhino's, and Andrew's, when I got back on to it again, was as obvious now. It looked as if he'd taken no pains to conceal his tracks, though he must have known that I would be after him. Or was that, maybe, just what he wanted now?—a last chapter of death and destruction in the jungle, now that his own escape was impossible. . . . Was he, I suddenly wondered, lying in ambush somewhere ahead? A familiar sensation came back to me then, the old tenseness of advancing along a path that was possibly ambushed, the feeling as of long nerve ends coiling ahead, the painful sharpness of ear and eye, the difficulty of normal breathing.

And all the time there was the fear for Nona.

I was choked and sick with hatred for Andrew and swore like a madman as I fell on the slippery ground and fell again twice in my efforts to get upright. I felt as though I'd completed a deep river crossing; sweat and raindrops brushed off the choking vegetation soaked me. The pack on my back caught in every creeper, and I cursed it a hundred times. My progress was a slow struggle, possibly no more than half a mile an hour. And the worst was still to come.

There was a shelf ahead, where the ground level rose a hundred and fifty feet in a steep wilderness of boulders—huge boulders, many of them, the biggest as big as a house. You came upon it suddenly.

I was afraid I'd lose Andrew's tracks here, and I did. I had no idea how far the shelf stretched to right and left of the track, but I feared it might be a mile wide or wider. It took an age to get up the slope of tilted, unsteady boulders. The surface was wet and as slippery as the clayey jungle floor, and each rock was likely to roll underfoot.

The sun by now was high in the clear sky, and the climb up the slope drenched me in a new flood of perspiration and dried out my throat. At the top the jungle again, pitch dark at first to my sunburnt eyes.

I wasted a good deal of time casting along the jungle edge, looking for the point at which Andrew had gone in, or else for signs of the old trail. After perhaps an hour I decided to give it up and just beat my own track to the cave, because that, I knew, was the place Andrew was headed for anyway.

For three hours I was lost—not totally lost, as it turned out, because when finally I reached the torrent I felt sure that the cave was no more

than about two hundred and fifty yards downstream. I was right.

When I knew I must be within a hundred yards of the cave I came upon a path. Down on my haunches beside it, I made out one or two impressions among the drifted dead leaves that could have been unfresh human tracks, and there was a single broken-off twig at human shoulder height. Certainly Andrew hadn't come this way, but in the past week or month a man or men had used the trail, I suspected.

At this point the jungle sloped before me so steeply that there were bald patches of limestone cliff in places. One cliff was much bigger than the rest and rounded like a great bay window three hundred feet high and half as broad. The precipitous drop was in two steps, a short one of twenty-five feet, ending in an uneven rock ledge, with the long drop below it. Andrew's cave opened on to that ledge.

Down the north side of the cliff the torrent cascaded in two falls. The first dropped the twenty-five feet to form a small pool that spilt over the lip of the ledge in a majestic white fall that could be heard, even through the thick, muffling jungle, for almost a mile.

The only approach to the ledge, except for rock climbers, was the one I made from the north. There was no need to step softly because the roar of the torrent masked any normal sounds of approach; but the thought of Andrew in ambush was still with me vividly.

Finally I came to the conclusion that for some reason Andrew hadn't yet reached the cave. I had circled the approach in a stealthy reconnaissance and satisfied myself that I had crossed no new track. Relaxing with a sigh that eased every weary muscle, I slipped through the spray-cool passage behind the column of falling water and moved openly on to the rock shelf that led up to the cave.

At the cave mouth I went stiff again. Beside my right foot lay a short length of wood, obviously cut for a fire. And round a spur of rock, in a miniature cave the size of a taxi-cab, were the remains of many fires, with a *kuali* for frying propped alongside, one or two old bones of fish and animal, an old cloth, and a chip from a white china plate.

It was a familiar picture. I knew then what I should find in the main cave. I went in warily, the safety catch off my gun just in case.

AFTER A thorough examination of the site I calculated that the terrorists had not been in camp for five, six or seven days.

It was a small camp, with roughly made bamboo bunks for sixteen men—one of the rest or training camps suspected by the security forces to have been set up in this area, which had been deliberately kept free of terrorist action to safeguard them. The condition of the camp testified to low morale, and several bottles of Chinese medicines on a shelf of bamboo suggested that the place may have been a hospital for part of its time. In the small recess in the roof where Andrew had kept his air-gun I found about twenty Mills bombs and a British army box of .303 ammunition. Some of the rounds had been filed down to make ugly dumdum bullets.

This was the old stuff, and strangely the discovery gave me some sort of assurance. The jungle seemed less lonely, and I was a soldier again, back on the battlefield. Leaving the cave, I went to the pool, took off my pack, and set it on a rock slab and put my gun and parang on it. Then I walked straight into the pool and into the hissing curtain of the little waterfall. After a minute my body had cooled and most of the sweat had been rinsed out of Sam's jungle-green battle suit.

Now I collected my equipment and, leaving the ledge the way I had come, found the way up to an old remembered hide-out at the forest edge, perched a hundred feet above the falls. It had been my refuge from Andrew seventeen years before. I was like a statue stuck in its niche there, in a limestone alcove screened by a cataract of hanging ferns.

I had drunk thirstily from the falls, opening my mouth to the cool sweetness that fell with a sting like soda water. Now I took a long swig of the Hennessy and ate a sort of cold Spanish omelet from the pack, blessing old Winnie with every bite. "Bring her back, Robert," she'd whispered, kissing me. "I love you both."

It was something like four hours before I saw him.

I had dozed for a while and been awakened by the ants, which had got inside my clothes and, when they couldn't find their way out, panicked and stung. With the sluggish, bad-tempered feeling a siesta always leaves with me, I went down to the falls again after I'd taken a long look round. Under the cool water curtain I enjoyed a luxurious shiver, finally closing my eyes and turning my face upward into the vertical torrent. For half a minute I stood like that, and when I lowered my head and opened my eyes, gasping, Andrew was coming out of the cave mouth.

There was a lot of blood on his face—evidently he'd had no parang to cut through the jungle with—and a gun in his hand. His khaki tunic and slacks were torn and his boots were mudstained. He was pretty nervous, dodging immediately behind the great fang of limestone that rose to the left of the cave mouth and staring in a slow semicircle round him. He looked dangerous. If I'd had Sam's gun with me I could have taken Sam's advice. "Shoot him as soon as you sight him," Sam had told me. But the gun was up in my hide-out.

Then Nona must be in the cave. I pictured her, exhausted by her struggles, close to death with fear of Andrew, fear of the jungle, of the dark cave and of the great bats hanging upside down above her head. My hands tightened into fists, and I hated myself. Leaving my gun behind in the hide-out had been a sort of court-martial offence, stupid, dangerous and dishonourable. It might even cost me my life, or Nona hers.

I watched Andrew through the water curtain. Like me, he had two enemies to watch out for. He must know that I'd be after him, possibly supported by the local police and even an army patrol; and he'd have found his cave was now a hide-out for jungle terrorists. His lips moved. He was talking to himself, or just cursing. Suddenly he raised his head, as if a warning had been whispered in his ear. He stared across the rock floor straight at me, straight at the white falls that hid me, his lips no longer moving. Then he looked away and was gone, passing beyond the little cave that was the terrorist kitchen.

I was turning away to get back to my hide-out and Sam's gun when my eye caught a flash of movement in the big cave.

The shock was like a physical



blow. Nona ran limping out of the cave, after giving a hunted animal's wild look round her. It took me a second to realize what she was doing. She wasn't just escaping. She was escaping in a final, despairing gesture, over the cliff.

I stepped through the falls, shouting as soon as I was past the water screen. "*Nona!*"

She halted on the brink of the drop, as if my shout had lassoed her, staring at me as if she didn't know me. Andrew came striding back round the rock buttress beyond the cave mouth. First he saw Nona and started towards her, but then he saw me and backed swiftly into the cave.

My eyes on the cave mouth, I ran and seized Nona's arm and swept her back along the ledge towards the jungle that was now a sanctuary. Andrew, with a rifle (one of the terrorist cache, I supposed, and loaded with dum dum bullets), was out of the cave while we were still on the bare rock ledge, just before we'd reached the spray-filled rock tunnel behind the falls, but his one shot went wide. A second after we'd plunged into the green shadow of the jungle beyond, he hadn't a chance.

Silent and panting exhaustedly, Nona clung to me. There's no point in making a long story of my return, with Nona slung across my back, to the hide-out where I'd left my gun and rucksack. It *was* a long story—half an hour for a quarter-of-a-mile climb.

We spoke very little. During the first ten minutes we often heard Andrew rasping out his curses and taunts as he tried to track us. Then we didn't hear him any more. When we sat down to rest for a moment Nona said, "He's mad, Robert. He's mad."

Her voice was weak and shivering. I kissed her and swore, "He'll never get you, Nona. By tomorrow this will all be over."

She only said, "He'll kill you, Robert. He knows he's got to die, but he's always been lonely and now he doesn't want to die alone. He's going to take us with him."

I kissed her again, and we struggled on, reaching my old hide-out at last. I gave her a swig from the Hennessy bottle, showed her the food and drew out a sweater. The sun had almost gone, and the night would be damp and cold. "Stay here, Nona," I said slowly, whispering close to her face. "*Stay*. I'll be back."

She clung and tried to keep me there when she saw me take up the gun and check the loading. I had to push her back as I set out.

A few minutes later what I was half expecting happened.

All the afternoon, blood had been welling through the eyelet holes of my jungle boots, showing that leeches had got in and were busy sucking me. Now there was a sharp pain by my right ankle, suggesting that a scrap of wood or rock had got inside the boot and sock to rub on one of the bleeding leech bites. Impatiently I sat down on two square yards of limestone outcrop and took off the boot, removed the tiny stone and three leeches, put a scrap of my handkerchief over the bloody mess and drew on the boot again. When I reached in the dusk for the gun I'd placed at my side, it wasn't there.

Before I was on my feet two hands reached out from behind me and clamped over my mouth—dirty hands, smelling of sweat and nicotine and soya sauce. Something poked bruisingly into my ribs. My eyes, turning wildly right and left, saw two green-uniformed figures with pale grey profiles and caps with five-pointed red stars.

One, with the rifle, was a man, young and powerful, though not tall. The other was a woman, her eyes more aslant than the man's, one side of her face stained gentian violet against some skin disease. She carried a carbine, and a Mills bomb hung from her belt.

I wasn't far from the track I'd found that morning, the track that marked the approach to the cave used as a terrorist unit's headquarters. This pair had been on their way to spend the night there, I suppose, when they'd spotted me. They had me badly scared.

The man said, "You go in front," slowly, as if recalling some English lessons with difficulty. "We shoot you if you try run away."

I believed him and I didn't try. Walking down the track to the cave through the deepening dusk, I pictured Nona in the hide-out, waiting—alone, as darkness came and the jungle night that was so much more alive than the jungle



day. The beasts of prey and the beasts that were their prey would be yawning and waking in this hour.

None of them would be a danger to Nona. There is nothing in the jungle that is a danger to man except, very rarely, the ill-tempered and powerful wild buffalo. But there were other dangers—the tormenting fancies civilized man has about the jungle. Imagination would torture her in the jungle darkness, and she would wait for me in agony.

Swearing monotonously, I followed the track until we were close to the expanse of open rock between the cave and the cliff edge. They stopped me there, and the man startled me with an imitation of the nightjar's call—not a lifelike imitation. Out of the dusk round the cave's mouth a thin, bedraggled figure stepped forward, making a circular gesture with both hands. The muzzle nudged the small of my back, and the voice behind me said, "Go on."

Inside the cave two terrorists were eating. Far back there was a candle burning on a ledge, and underneath it Andrew sat sprawled, mopping blood from his forehead.

They pushed me across the uneven floor to join him.

It must have been an hour, or possibly two hours, past midnight that Andrew began to talk. Until then he ignored me, just as he had so often in the old days, though now he didn't even say, "Shut up, young Robert. I don't want you here." He ignored me altogether, mopping a long cut in his brow with the remains of his singlet, which he'd soaked in the pool beyond us. After a few minutes he'd turned away from me, lain down, and slept or appeared to sleep.

It never occurred to me that I could have attempted to strangle him as he lay sleeping at my side. If it had, I don't believe I'd have given the idea a moment's consideration. Now that I needn't fear him any more, or fear what he could do to Nona, I was almost back in my old bewildered relationship with him. I tried to sleep too. Whatever lay ahead, it was worth conserving what strength I had left.

He started talking some time after midnight, suddenly throwing out a taunt as if in the middle of a conversation, his voice covered by the noise of the falls. "Well, you were just too smart, weren't you?"

His voice shook me out of my tired, neutral reverie. I didn't say anything, but I knew what was coming.

"You were going to make a get-away without a word to me," he said, lowering his voice. "Was that it, young Robert?"

He had remembered the tunnel at the back of the cave I had discovered one day when we were boys, camping here. When I boasted about it then and he couldn't find it himself he had resorted to petty torture to extort the secret. I'd been tough enough to keep it to myself.

I fought the feeling of disloyalty his tone was intended to evoke—quite successfully, but there was a moment in which it had to be resisted. Yes, I had decided to make the attempt alone, grateful that the terrorists would make a quick job of executing him, without the humiliation of a trial in Ipoh or Kuala Lumpur; without the repulsive necessity, maybe, for me to do the job myself in the dark jungle.

"Leaving these thugs to do your dirty, murderous business for you," Andrew went on, with a fine edge of scorn to his voice.

"You'd prefer one of Her Majesty's hangmen?" I was stung into asking.

We were sparring and taunting like a pair of children, a grotesque exchange of cross-talk, with death rushing close in the darkness.

Shadows moved in the shadow, and he was on his feet. "Let's go."

When I didn't answer him he bent over me. "You're not getting out alone, young Robert. You always like to think you can ignore me, but don't you see, I've got nothing to lose now. I'll wake the bloody lot of them if you try it solo."

I got on my feet with a bitter taste of disgust in my mouth. "It wasn't so easy when I was a shrimp of ten. Now, it may not be much better than the eye of a needle."

Andrew got behind me and with a sigh of defeat I made my way along the cave wall, feeling for the small hollow, always filled with water, that formed the first foothold for the climb up the wall. I started upward without a word to Andrew. Up on a rock platform slippery with bat guano, I groped for the tunnel opening. I'd expected all the bats to be out in the middle of the night, but there were plenty hanging there, and the feel of them round my head was unpleasant. They were big bats, as big as cats almost, and they mewed softly and bad-temperedly at being disturbed. Andrew slipped in the guano and swore.

I said, "You have to get in feet first, because there's a steep drop to start with. Then crawl on your stomach."

He was quick. As I braced myself to go through I found my way blocked. He was half in already. I climbed in after him and at once the place seemed far smaller and more airless than I'd remembered.

I'd known it would be easy for the first hundred yards, easy though slow. But far ahead lay the short waist of the tunnel, an ordeal even in my eleventh year; and again, just short of the exit, the corkscrew ascent in which I'd fought for what seemed hours before I'd discovered, in a frenzy of panic, the heel-and elbow lift that could hoist me out.

As we wriggled forward, grazing skin on the fretted limestone, the air changed. The stink of the bats faded, and a stale, unwholesome fungus smell took its place, a tomb smell. The temperature rose, too, or seemed to rise.

As soon as I felt the rock walls grow smooth and damp, I remembered that the tunnel's "waist" lay close ahead, and almost at once I found Andrew halted just beyond me. I wasn't sorry now that he had slipped in first. When I'd been waiting to be sure he slept before I could make my way out alone, the thought of getting stuck in the subterranean darkness had chilled my spine. Now he'd be the one to get stuck if the passage was as narrow as I feared.

I jerked his ankle and said, "Turn over. The ceiling isn't smooth, and you should be able to pull yourself along with your hands."

I had to say it three times before he could hear me properly, and then he took an age to get through the waist. He wasn't so very far from panic, I believe, and tried too hard, attempting a passage by force when serpentine insinuation was the only possible technique. But he got through finally, and when I made my own way through, more easily than I'd expected, he was so far ahead that I couldn't hear him at all.

I didn't catch up with him, in fact, until I reached the final stretch, a few yards short of the exit. And there he stuck, in the final corkscrew turn of a rising passage which widened suddenly, but where the vertical clearance was not quite ten inches.

By the time I reached him he was whimpering in panic, kicking with his one free foot and now and then shouting words I couldn't catch. It took some time for him to react to my tug at his ankle, and when he stopped his noise he took ages to hear what I was trying to tell him. His body blocked the rising, twisting passage almost as tightly as a cork in a bottle, and blurred sound between us. And his first attempts to follow

my instructions were too clumsy, too crudely headlong to get him more than a few inches.

Now I was furious that he had got in front. Soon I was shouting at him.

"Twist yourself, you bloody fool! It's a corkscrew."

His panic began to infect me. There wasn't enough air behind us; we'd never get back through the waist feet first, and there was no place in between where we could pass each other and I could make my own attempt to get through.

Drenched in sweat and shuddering with the effort, I pushed him forward, millimetre by millimetre, inch by inch, and then it was a foot, more, a yard, and he was shuddering too. I knew that now, even if dawn had not yet broken, he could see the exit, that ahead of him lay nothing but the little pool of rusty water and then the easy, wide slope up to the creeper-muffled exit shaped like a tilted Gothic window.

Suddenly, just as my strength gave out and my straining heart felt as though it must drown in its own blood, I felt Andrew abandon his resistance, and almost at once the ankles were torn from my hands and the space ahead became empty and cool; fresh air came curling down the spiral towards me.

I heard a splash in the pool of rusty water, and then hands tearing at the creepers. I saw weak, greenish light ahead, and by the time I'd hoisted myself into the narrows Andrew was crouching in the Gothic opening, the day lightening behind him. With an exultant gulp of the sweeter air, I heaved myself forward and upward, reaching the final squeeze of the narrows in one long, eeling motion, so that the little pool was within reach of my outstretched fingers.

There I stuck, though.

Floor and ceiling had closed in to clamp me in a grip that would allow only short, shallow gasps of air. My lungs could not even quarter-open, and my rib case felt bent already and on the point of cracking. Now I realized that, though Andrew was taller and broader, I had the deeper chest. There was nobody to heave at my feet and thrust my powerless body the last inches forward; but Andrew was just beyond me, and a heave at my hands would have me out in no time, surely.

But Andrew's hands weren't stretched down to haul me out. They were closed over a small grey bomb, and he was smiling.

HE WAS smiling in the sick, green light, and my sluggish brain took a moment to adjust itself to a reality outside the tunnel and the all-devouring concentration on escape. "Smart, but never quite smart enough," Andrew said. "That's you, young Robert, isn't it?"

His black hair was caked with sweat and blood from the long wound over his right eye. His torn khaki shirt was soaked with the rusty red alkali from the tunnel floor. There was something wrong with his eyes. . . .

Yes, he'd been smarter than I had. He'd pocketed one of the little bombs from the terrorists' armoury as soon as he'd reached the cave and found them, and he'd kept it effectively hidden when they caught him.

Andrew sighed—possibly the sort of sigh that follows the admission that all good things must come to an end. With the precise movement of a weapons instructor demonstrating to recruits, he raised the bomb a little and drew out the pin. I began to count.

If it was a modern Mills bomb I had four seconds now to live. If it was one of the old ones, still encountered in terrorist armouries, or one of the Jap imitations, I might have seven seconds.

One

Andrew said, "Too bad about this. There was no need, if only you hadn't——"

Two

"—always had a down on me."

Three

He was moving. He said, "So long, young Robert!" his face now rather young and awed, and then he dropped the bomb.

Four

Andrew was gone, and the disturbed creepers over the tunnel mouth discharged a shower of heavy raindrops. The bomb rolled gently down the slope towards me, making a soft rumbling noise on the smooth wet rock, jiggling from side to side like a rolling rugger ball before it fell *plop* into the little heart-shaped pool of rust-red water.

Five

Most of them were waterproof. It was either a dud or one of the old ones with a seven-second fuse. Or had I been counting too fast? Something stronger than I, something that seemed outside me, jerked my body forward—just two or three inches forward, compressing my ribs

like the Nurnberg Iron Maiden and filling my mouth with a gush of bitter fluid, but far enough to plunge my left hand into the pool and seize the bomb.

Six

In my head there was a throbbing roar like dive bombers attacking. My contorted arm could not throw the thing back down the spiral, though there was a clear space alongside me. I could only drop it again and pray for it to roll down beside me, down round the gently sloping corkscrew behind me, so that I'd be out of the direct line of the explosion. Only there wasn't time. It began to roll, drunkenly, from side to side.

Seven

I couldn't see it now, but when I felt it roll into me, a little above my ankle, my pinned-down body suddenly convulsed in a seal-like motion forward. I believe I made some progress, and I threw my rigid body into a second effort. The bomb exploded in the same moment, giving the final impetus to my final heave forward. In a whirl of shock my right leg was on fire and I was spinning through space, miles and miles of black space, like some star being born out of nothingness.

ACHING AND giddy, I climbed out through the Gothic arch and into the dark shadow of the jungle. The sun was up. My watch showed six thirty. A splinter of shrapnel or rock was embedded in my right calf, and the whole leg was more than half numb. My head ached as never before, for it had struck the rock wall violently when the explosion propelled me forward.

I'd just started to make my way towards the hide-out in which I'd left Nona, when rifle fire sounded down by the cave—two or three exchanges. Pushing on, constantly having to make detours along the line of least resistance, for want of a parang to cut a path, I gradually formed the conviction that I wouldn't find Nona there any more. It was a conviction that grew and persisted so strongly that when I reached the little rock niche and found it empty there was no shock.

The rucksack was still there, which surely meant that the terrorists couldn't have found her. They'd have taken the remaining sweater, food, brandy and first aid kit. Only half consciously I was eating, drinking, and fixing a bandage round my forehead—the last in the hope of

stopping blood from flooding my eyes, as it had several times already.

I found her tracks easily enough in the small expanse of mud outside. She had left alone. Her tracks were easy at first, but it worried me that, however much they wandered, they led steadily downhill, steadily nearer to the cave. Once I found a thin clump of grasses that were still rising, very slowly, after being trodden underfoot, and I knew she had passed this way between fifteen and forty minutes earlier. She was close.

But only a minute later I halted at the edge of a patch of swamp. Here surely she must have been badly scared, because I could see clearly that she had run right into the black, bad-smelling swamp from which she'd have shrunk in fear and disgust if not driven into it.

I stood there, cursing silently, scared and sick. Then I saw what had panicked her. One of the terrorists lay at the swamp edge, dead or dying. The firing and this dying bandit must mean that Sam's patrol had at last made contact. A sense of sharp acceleration possessed me, and I tore my way round the swamp and found Nona's tracks again.

And not three minutes later I saw her. She was leaning back against a blooming penaga tree, her eyes closed, her hands loose and desolate. She wore the torn woollen sweater of Sam's, from the rucksack. Andrew, a rifle at the half ready, stood opposite her, his dark face twisting as he talked.

I looked down at my empty hands and cursed. Andrew had stolen another march on me, finding the dying terrorist and disarming him a few minutes before I discovered him. I stepped quickly back into deep shadow, but he had already seen me. "Right, young Robert," he said slowly. "Out here and up with your hands."

I had to do it. I managed to edge a couple of yards towards Nona before he snapped, "Keep still now!" and moved forward. When he stopped he was no more than four yards from me.

"Correction, Nona," he said. "Robert didn't die at sunrise this morning. He's going to die now."

She was looking at me, her face so blank and calm that I wondered whether she was aware of what was going on. I couldn't think of anything to say to her.

Andrew's face was twitching under the black stubble. He looked handsome and horribly mad, and there was something uncanny about his eyes.

"It's neater this way," he said, turning the muzzle towards Nona this time. "And more traditional. Adulteresses and their lovers were condemned to die together in old Malaya, in these jungles."

I needed to move still a yard nearer to Nona, under the penaga tree. Taking a deep breath, I moved a pace to my left.

"I said keep still, young Robert!" he rapped out, eyes blazing in the reflection of sunlight from the sandbank. "Just for that——"

He closed one eye and raised the rifle swiftly.

My two hands seized the thick, serpentine branch two feet above my head, and my feet left the ground. As I leaped to meet the branch, it dipped to meet me, and my ankles crossed above it for a moment. A shot split the silence and went I don't know where.

Andrew charged just as I swung forward and dropped. My right foot



caught him in the belly, and he scissored and fell. This time I didn't do a thing wrong. My feet didn't slip as I landed, and I had his rifle in my hand before I'd straightened up. He was still not on his feet when the bullet tore through his ribs and burnt through his heart.

I turned my back on him and went to Nona. She had turned away to stare across the stream, standing rigid, her small, bleeding feet planted on the edge of the white sand.

"It's finished," I said and put my arms round her.

Very quietly she asked, "Is he——" She couldn't say the word.

She wasn't thinking of me. It was still Andrew.

I said, "Wait, Nona. Stay there." And I went back to Andrew. It wasn't time for relief yet. He was trying dreadfully to get to his feet, his face gone old and tragic. A desperate awe that wasn't quite pity took hold of me, and I found myself lifting the hair that had fallen blindly over his eyes. I saw then what was so odd about them; when he'd got the wound on his forehead the brown contact lens over his right eye had been smashed or dislodged, and it was one of his own blue Avery eyes that my gesture revealed. With his blue eye and his brown eye he looked from me to Nona down by the stream, and then slowly they filled with tears. Tears of self-pity, it may be, as he took his last look at the two who, like the rest of the world, had let him down and thwarted his destiny. I don't know. Then he turned away and died.

Down at the edge of the sandbank I took Nona's arm and said, "Yes, it's finished." And I added as I led her away, "Everything starts from now."

She said, "The last words I spoke to him were, 'If you've really killed Robert you can't frighten me with a gun.' Then you came."

The morning jungle seemed beautiful, despite my exhaustion and wounds, full of the freshness and relief of exorcism. I was dizzy with it all, and Andrew had already begun his fall back to unimportance—for us both, I dared to hope.

Sam's booming shout startled us both before we'd gone very far. I answered, and we started forward down a game track with new energy. And, sure enough, there were Sam and two Malay soldiers on a limestone outcrop over to our right. We turned towards them, like the sole survivors of a fatal disaster, dazed and numb, but moving into a future we thought we had lost.



Mark Derby

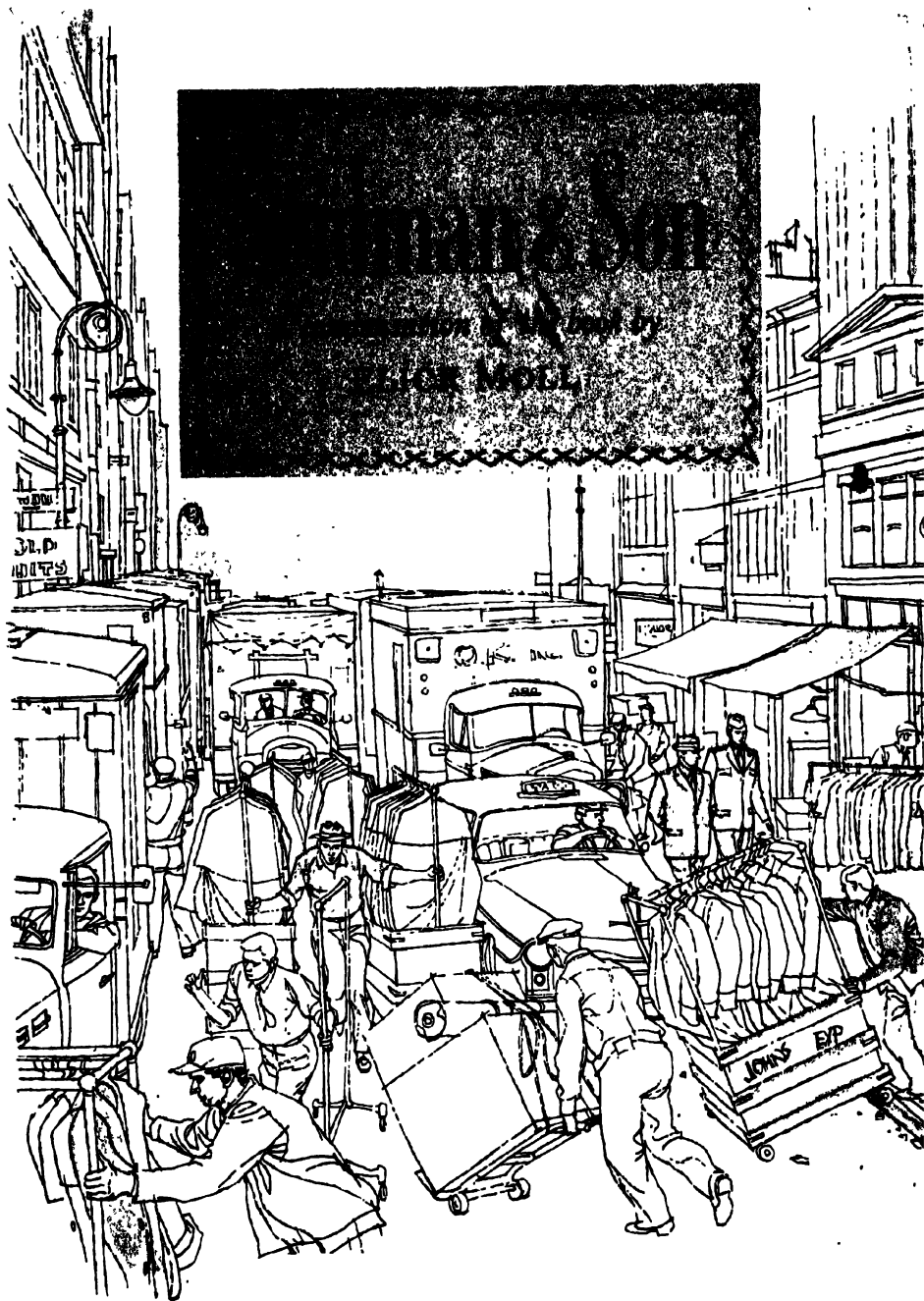
MARK DERBY, who was born in Dorset, went to Scotland at sixteen and for four years worked on the editorial staff of a boys' magazine—a diet that proved too mild for a man of his temperament. During the thirties, after the failure of a first novel, he wandered through England and the Continent, mostly on foot, earning a precarious living by writing and by seasonal farm work, and studying explosive political situations.

In the Second World War, he was an ack-ack gunner in the Battle of Britain, a staff officer with the Guards Armoured Division in the invasion of Normandy, and, later, Chief of Army Information in Allied Headquarters in Indonesia. In the troubled years following the war, he commanded a force of Dyak trackers against the Communists in the guerilla fighting in Malaya.

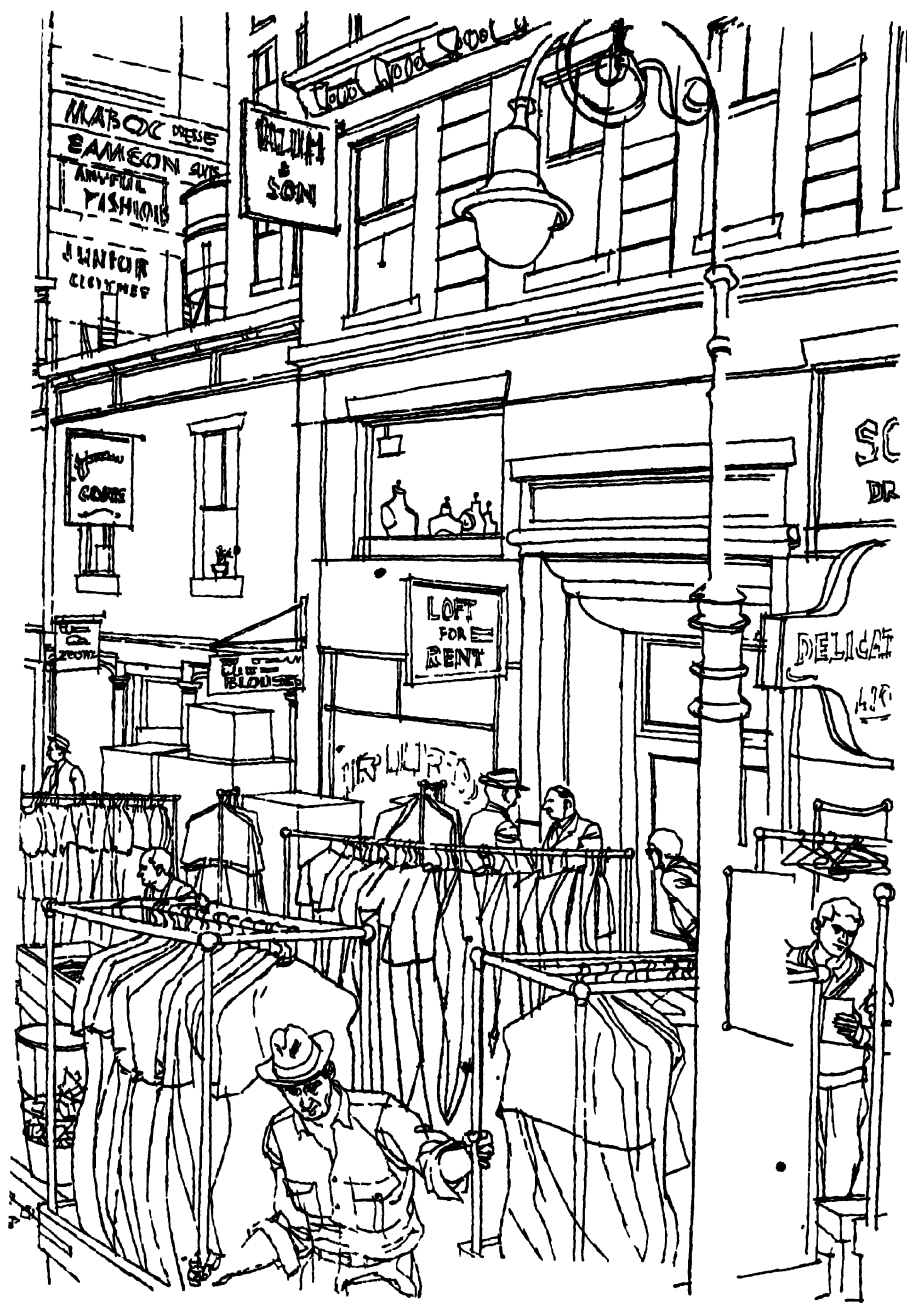
With the publication of his book, *Malayan Rose*, in 1911 he established a sound reputation for romantic-adventure-suspense novels—a reputation substantially enhanced by five subsequent books.

A bachelor, Mr. Derby now has a cottage on the island of Minorca, where he has taken up gardening. He travels widely, not only to find material for his books, but to make friends and explore the way of life of different people all over the world.

SEIDMAN AND SON



"Seidman and Son" is published by Peter Davies, London



Illustrations by Ken Riley

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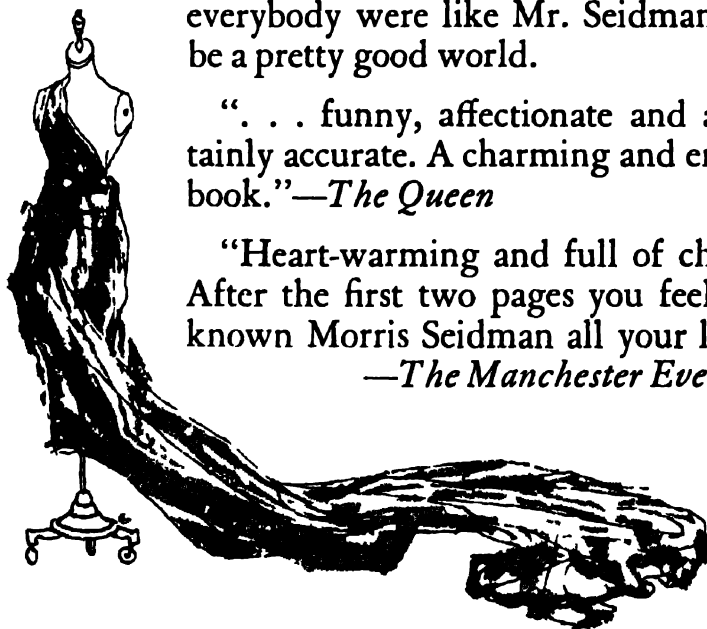
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ONE

Excuse me. You don't mind if I share this bench with you for a couple of minutes? Got to rest a little from this dog. You wonder sometimes how could such a small creature hold so much energy. So much emotion. *Sit down already, Sam. Sit. Give me a chance to catch my breath at least.*

You're sure we don't disturb you? I mean some people are getting nervous from dogs. My sister Bessie only got to look at him, she starts sneezing. Yes, he's a nice little feller, very friendly, so long as you're not a milkman. I'm sorry you're not seeing him at his best, he made himself these bald spots from scratching. I had him to the doctor this morning, he put on some medicine, it's such a hideous colour, like a couple black eyes in the wrong place. *All right, Sam, don't get insulted. On you it looks good.*

Excuse me, I didn't make the introductions. My name is Morris Seidman, I'm in the dress business, wholesale, I got a factory in Seventh Avenue. This is Sam, short for Samson, fox hunter, retired. The name? Well, a Saint Bernard he's not, like you see. When he was a puppy you

could hide him in your pocket and there would be room for your gloves besides. Only put him down, he would stand so fine, proud, with the chest out, like a little gladiator. So the first time my boy Harold saw him he says, "Hello, Samson." And that was the name.

Thank you, I'm not much for cigarettes. Could I offer you a cigar? No, I'm not going in to the shop today. For one day my business could run itself. What is your line, may I ask? You're a writer? Is that so? I got a big respect for writers. Listen, I'll ask you something, if you wouldn't laugh. From where does it come, the idea for a story? Somebody should start out with nothing, an empty page, and pretty soon there's a story, people living through things—well, it's kind of a magic, no? I mean, creating. Like you would be, in a small way, God.

Excuse me. Sam, you got to stop scratching yourself. You'll make yourself a disaster there. Stop it now. You want Harold should come back, see you like this?

Look how he's chewing himself to pieces there. Isn't it terrible? We tried everything already, shots, vitamins, salve. I'm getting worried. You know, belongs to my boy, the dog, and before he went away he said, "Pop, I want you to see nothing happens to Sam while I'm gone." And if I got to tell him now we got to maybe put the dog away—

Breaks your heart, you know, to see a creature like this, depends on you for everything and you can't do anything for it. I got, anyway, a little bit of a guilty feeling towards the little feller. You see, in the beginning, I got to confess I was against the whole idea, to have a dog in the house. I thought, a city apartment, who needs it, it could only be a nuisance. Now we got a house, in Great Neck, with a garden, it's a different story, but in those days we were living in the Majestic Towers, it's right there, you could see, Seventy-second Street. My boy Harold practically grew up together with the dog here in Central Park. I got in the neighbourhood a vet, the dog is used to him and vice versa, I don't like to change now. So I bring him in from Great Neck, and after the doctor is putting on the medicine it stings, so I give him a little reward. I take him for a stroll in the Park. Well you should see. From two blocks away he's already shaking himself to pieces with excitement. Who knows what he remembers, in his little dog's head?

Why did I change my mind? You mean to get the dog? Well, I got to go back a few years.

I don't know if you remember six, seven years ago, there was starting up a whole business with psychology. Lectures, courses, child psychologists, I'm telling you it was a regular circus. So my wife Sophie, God bless her, she doesn't want to be left in the lurch, she starts going to lectures and *shlepping* home books and pretty soon we got an expert on psychology in the house.

One morning, breakfast, after the children are going away to school, she says to me, "Morris, did you notice how shiny Harold looked this morning? His hair? His shoes? Do you know he's wearing a stocking cap on his head now when he goes to sleep?"

Did I notice! You think there's something about my Harold I never noticed? Believe me, I got it all in my mind from when he was a minute old.

"And he's polishing his shoes every day," Sophie says, "and there's phone calls coming in from girls I never even heard of them. I'm afraid, Morris," she says, "we got on our hands an adolescent boy."

"What do you mean you're afraid," I said. "What do you want to have on your hands, an adolescent man? Or a middle-aged boy?"

"Never mind," she says, "it's a problem. We've got to think about it. I think we should get him a dog," she says. "Because a boy Harold's age, it's not good this nonsense, girls, Vaseline on the hair. With a dog he can care for it and run with it after school and be occupied."

"I got a better idea," I say. "I will buy for him a bicycle for his birthday. English model. He can care for it and run with it and be occupied. And I won't have to pay every six months for new rugs and new furniture from a dog."

Well, we are meeting, about this time, a certain Dr. Thalberg, a dentist. A D.D.S. Now I got the greatest respect for the professions, I don't want you should misunderstand me. But this Thalberg—well, I better not talk about him. The main thing, he is such a fancy feller that if he's got a dog it's got to be a special kind, nobody else in the country has got one like it. So one evening we are invited to his home—I suppose a dentist, he thinks people like Sophie and me, it's sooner or later with the dentures, anyway we're getting to meet Rudolph. You know who Rudolph is? A wire-haired dachshund.

Now I'll tell you the truth, to me this is an animal for which there is absolutely no reason. A plain dachshund is already bad enough, its

stomach drags on the ground and the whole mechanism walks like a duck, but this one has got besides grey hair and a beard and when you come into the house it lays down on its back with its feet in the air, you should only scratch its stomach. Would you tolerate such a thing from your own child even? But it's doing, besides, tricks. And the big celebration is when Thalberg says to the dog, "Rudy, go in the bedroom and bring me out my slippers." So Rudy goes in the bedroom and comes dragging out half of a pyjama and my Sophie practically loses her mind, the dog is so cute.

"Morris," she says, "I don't care what, we've got to have a dog like Rudy. I never saw anything so darling in my whole life."

Darling. To me this is not such a valuable asset in a dog. I like better that a dog should have about himself a little dignity. But with a woman, if something is *darling*, a dress or a hat or a dog or a dentist, it's the greatest thing in the world.

"Dr. Thalberg knows where we can get a puppy from the same family," she says next day. "Only three hundred dollars."

"Three hundred dollars!" I holler. "It would be cheaper to build a machine to bring you half a pyjama from the bedroom."

But starts up now a campaign between my Sophie and Thalberg. Harold is introduced to Rudy. Pretty soon he is dropping in after school at Dr. Thalberg's to play a little with Rudy. You know how it is with a boy and a dog and my Harold is anyway the kind of a kid who would carry round a beetle in his pocket to keep it warm. He would fall in love with a mouse if it came three times in a row in the house. So now everything is Rudy. Rudy can sit up and beg. Rudy can count up to four. Rudy is from a royal family of dogs, Thalberg has papers to prove it, the King of Italy owned the grandfather and Ribbentrop owned the grandmother. Can you imagine? If I was a dog and somebody gave me such a recommendation I would hang myself.

Finally, from wanting this kind of dog, Harold is getting upset, nervous, he can't do his homework, he's getting bad marks at school.

"Look what you're doing to the boy," my wife says.

"I'm doing?" I say. "Harold was an average boy, like other boys. All he wanted was a new bicycle. All of a sudden he's an adolescent, with problems, the only thing that will help him is a dog for three hundred dollars. You and your psychology," I say.

Well, it's no use. Next day, Thalberg wants to have lunch with me. All right. I meet him at Manny's Pastrami Heaven and right away he says, "Seidman, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"All right, I'm ashamed of myself. You want appetizer or soup?"

"That's a wonderful boy you've got," he says. "What's three hundred dollars?"

"Well, I'll tell you," I say. "I got a bill from you for two hundred and seventy five dollars for inlays, acrylics, I don't know what. Three hundred dollars is twenty-five dollars more."

"All right," he says. "I'll get him the dog."

"Over my dead body," I yell out, so the waiter runs over to see is anything the matter with the soup. The nerve of this dentist, first he makes my boy crazy with his wire-haired dachshund, then he's going to do me a big favour and buy him a dog. You think it's the three hundred dollars? I would spend ten times three hundred dollars to give my boy a little happiness. It's the principle. I don't like a man should be pushed around in his own house.

But I see finally I got no alternative. So I come home and I give in. All right, I say, get the dog. You think maybe now I'm a hero? On the contrary, Thalberg is the hero. I'm still a monster—only a little reformed. But the main thing, Harold is in seventh heaven. So I don't even care if Thalberg is being a big man, he'll call up the kennel, make all the arrangements, pick out the dog, everything. All I got to do is just sign the cheque and be a monster.

Now steps into the story, like in a regular story in a book, Fate. What's happening, this kennel, it's some kind of a pent-house for dogs, I guess, and you got to make there an appointment. There's altogether three puppies. These dogs are so fancy, they're not even born in bunches like regular dogs. One at a time, like an antelope or something. So finally there's an appointment made for Saturday, Harold should come and the dogs will look him over. Well, like I said, on Friday night comes along Fate, or somebody, with a match, the whole place burns to the ground, pedigrees and all. So now I really got a situation on my hands. And all of a sudden, Thalberg isn't there. Before, to make a mish-mash, he was Johnny on the spot. Now I got to call him three times before I can talk to him on the phone. "Listen," I say, "you know what happened. The boy is heartbroken. Do something."

"Don't worry," he says. "Tell Harold not to worry. Leave everything to me. I'll get him a dog."

A week goes by, Harold don't eat, he don't sleep and he's got such a look on his face I can't sleep from it neither. I ring up Thalberg again. It's a business with messages, his nurse, the exchange, he's consulting, he's operating, I don't know what. Finally he's on the phone. "Mr. Seidman," he says, "I'm very fond of your boy. But I'm a busy man. I've got a practice to attend to."

"Why didn't you attend to it in the first place?" I ask him. "I was going to get the boy a bicycle, he was happy——"

"What would you like me to do, manufacture him a dog?"

I'm holding myself in. What I would like him to do, he would have to be an acrobat. "I would like you should get him a dog." I'm shouting now. "A wire-haired dachshund. A grandson of the King of Italy. This was your idea in the first place, no?"

"Don't get excited," he says. "I'm working on it. Relax."

So it's another two days. Nothing. Again I call up Thalberg. His nurse is on the wire. Dr. Thalberg went to Florida for a month. For a rest. I'm telling you. If I could have got my hands on him just then, he would have had a rest, permanent.

So what should I do? Well, in my business, when I want something, I put an ad in the paper, let them come to me. So I write up an ad in the *Sunday Times* and they're starting to come to me. Such letters I never got in my life. From the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, would I make a donation. From people they want to sell me dog biscuits, cocker spaniels, veterinary service—but from wire-haired dachshunds not a single, solitary word.

So finally, on a Saturday, I take Harold out for a walk and I talk to him, like a man. "Harold," I say, "I know with young people nowadays it's a theory that if you want a foolish answer, you only got to ask your father a question. What I want to say to you is only one thing. Supposing some day you are falling in love with a girl, a beauty, the most wonderful girl in the world, she looks just like a wire-haired dachshund. Something happens. She moves away. Or she likes somebody else better. So what are you going to do? Kill yourself? You got to have a sense of proportion in life. There's other dogs in the world. Let's go take a look at least."

Well, my Harold, when he's not got standing over him a fancy dentist

to make him crazy, is really a fine, sensible boy, so he says, "All right, Pop, let's go take a look," and he smiles and then he gives such a sigh from the bottom of his shoes I would like to take an X-ray machine and hit Thalberg on the head with it.

Starts now a business with pet shops and kennels, you wouldn't believe it. How many. It's swimming already in front of my eyes, black dogs, brown dogs, red dogs, spaniels, Scotties, setters. But it's no use. Harold's got in his head this fixed idea of a wire-haired dachshund and he can't see anything else.

So I get a call now from my sister Bessie, in Flushing. She is the Helpful Hannah in our family. She's got a solution to the whole problem. What is it? Her neighbour has a cat, it just had kittens, she doesn't want to keep them, so we can have them, all six.

"Thank you very much," I say. "A boy wants a dog, you want to give him instead six kittens?"

"Why not?" she says. "You don't have to spoil this boy with fancy dogs, Morris, for three hundred dollars. My Sidney never had anything but a cat and it didn't stop him from growing up."

No. Didn't stop him from being a dope neither. But I say, "All right, Bessie, I'll talk it over with the boy."

Well, I wouldn't even say anything to Harold, naturally. I got nothing against cats but there's cat people and dog people, and if it was up to me I would never have a cat in the house. They only give you an inferiority complex. Anyway, I should have known, if my sister Bessie comes up with a solution to a problem, it will fit like a girdle on an elephant.

So I'm at the end of my wits already, when steps in again Fate. One day we are passing a pet shop, right in our own neighbourhood, we never went in there, looked so poor, you know. So I say, "Harold, let's try here, what can we lose?" We go in and it's the same story. Cages with bulldogs, with poodles, with Scotties. jumping and yelling, and Harold is standing, looking, with his sad face, it hurts me just to look at him.

Well, I'm ready to turn round and go out when again, Fate. In a cage at the back, like they would be hiding it, are standing four puppies. They haven't got pedigrees, most pet shops wouldn't even handle this type of dog. So three of the puppies are jumping round, barking, making

themselves crazy like all the rest. But at the back is a fourth one, a little number, standing by himself, one ear up and the other falling down and honest to God, it looks just like he would be saying, "You want to make fools of yourselves, go ahead. Me, I got more important things to think about."

I'm starting in to laugh, looking at him, it's so funny, he's such a little feller, and I call over Harold he should take a look. And all of a sudden, a miracle, a smile is coming on his face and he goes closer to the cage. I quick call over the man from the shop. "These dogs," I say. "They got a name, or they're just dogs?"

"They're mostly fox terrier," he says, and he opens the cage and takes one and holds him out to Harold.

"Not that one," I tell him. "The one at the back."

He gives me a look. "That's the runt of the litter," he says.

"No insults," I say. "I'm not so tall myself. Just introduce us."

So he takes out the little feller and puts him on the floor and he just stands there looking up, so much dignity, I'm telling you, I don't know what to say. And Harold, he can't help himself. He kneels down and he picks up the little number and holds him in his two hands, big as a minute. "Hello, Samson," he says and I know it's no more a problem about a dog in our family.

Excuse me. Every time I'm thinking about the little feller—*ach*, I'm getting to be an old fool. I'm not a fanatic from animals. But with this little person, this Sam, it's something funny. From the minute he came into the house it's like there would be another member of the family. In the middle of the day, I'm in the showroom talking to a customer, all of a sudden falls into my head a picture of that creature standing, with his little face like somebody dropped some ink on it, and his chest sticking out, so manly, and it's giving me a twist inside, I got to run to the telephone, find out how is he.

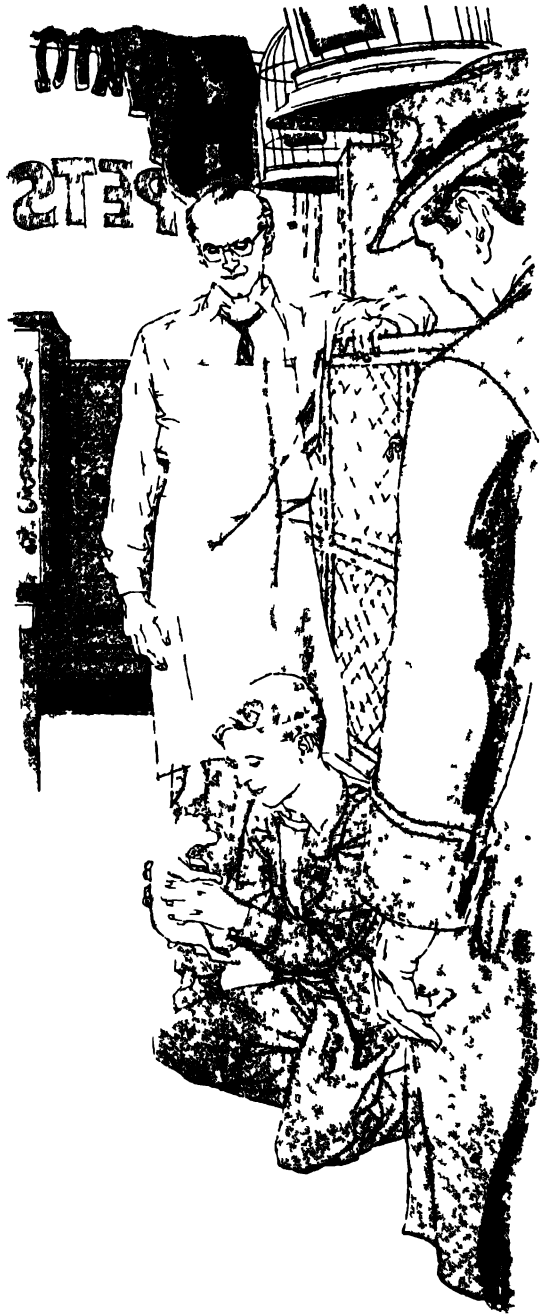
My Sophie, three, four times a night she's sneaking into Harold's room to see is Sam warm, does he want water. Even our daughter Jenny, she's taking the time to make him a little sweater, in her sewing class at school.

And with Harold, well, this is altogether a wonderful thing. Just to show you how it is, I'm getting one day a letter from a man in Dubuque, Iowa, he just woke up, he's got a wire-haired dachshund he wants to

sell me. When I show Harold the letter, he gives a look, like it's a notice from the gas company, then he picks up Sam and he says, "We've got all the dogs we need in this family."

Well, it's like a dream, how the years are going by. I'm talking about this like it would be yesterday. It's already six years Samson isn't a puppy. And my Harold—one day he's a boy thirteen and it's a big tragedy with a wire haired dachshund, and you turn round for a minute and he's a man, a soldier in uniform, he's got to go away to war. So this time they're calling it a police action. It's still shooting. All I know is my boy is in Korea, another world.

This dog, you know when he started up this scratching business? Maybe you will think I'm not so good in the head, imagining things, but it was on a Saturday, three weeks ago, I'm home from the office and I see the dog is acting somehow



funny, restless, something, he's jumping up every few minutes, going to the door, looking, like he's expecting the bell to ring, and when finally it's the telegraph boy standing there you maybe wouldn't believe it but the little feller is starting to shiver and he makes a noise in the throat, like he is trying not to cry, and I can't look at my wife, I know already what kind of telegram this is, from the War Office.

Hah? Yes, sure, we got yet hope. The commander, he wrote us a very fine letter. He says when they are missing it's always hope. But it's a little hard, you know, you are wondering all the time where, how, is he cold, sick, maybe they took him prisoner, those crazy fanatics, what they do to people.

Well, you must excuse me, I suppose you got your own troubles. When you got nothing to do but wait and wait you're sometimes talking too much. *Come on, Sam, we got to go home. Got to put on some more medicine. Maybe will give you a little relief.* Can you imagine how an old fool is carrying on about a dog? It's like a child would get sick in the family, honest to God.

TWO

WELL, my writer friend, you are just in time. I am going to buy you the finest lunch in the city of New York. I got wonderful news to tell you. You remember what you wrote me in your letter from California—I shouldn't give up hope, sometimes God writes happy endings too, not only Hollywood? Well, we got word from our boy. He is in a hospital in Pusan, not even wounded but the doctor put down for him shock and exposure. So you can imagine how we're feeling here. Mrs. Seidman and I were up the whole night talking. The silliest things. When did he lose his first tooth? How many words did he say when he was nine months old? Incidentally, it was a remarkable thing, thirty-two words. Well, you know parents.

No, don't worry about my business. Today I am too excited to pay attention to business. You remember you said in your letter you were breaking your head at the studio to think of a Christmas story? Because happens I got for you a Christmas story. Maybe you could get from it an idea, turn it round some way, the way we're doing here in the shop

with patterns, materials, sometimes, to save a little goods, or improve a little the fit of a garment. I suppose you writers are doing the same thing.

So, anyway, I had a partner in my business one time, Max Birnbaum. He is retired now, living in Florida with his wife, but for quite a few years we were inseparable.

You'll let me be for a minute a little philosophical, yes? I've been working since I was thirteen years old. I'm not complaining, you understand. I got things a king couldn't have, couple hundred years ago. Only sometimes there's this feeling, how should I explain it? Here I'm living in the greatest city in the world, a city like an Arabian Nights, and what do I know about it? Things are happening every minute, sad things, funny things, crazy things. But me, I'm living like in a tunnel, with steam heat. Styles, orders, materials, orders, styles—you know what I mean? It's a kind of feeling, it don't make much sense, but when you got it, you got a hunger to talk to somebody, it shouldn't be about styles or the union.

So whom should I talk to? My wife? Right away she gives me a look and I'm sitting with a thermometer in my mouth and a teaspoonful of cascara. My daughter Jenny? She would say, "Come on, Pop, turn the record over. This side's gruesome." Even with Harold, I would feel embarrassed.

So who? My designer maybe? I'm only too happy I can stay out of her way, she shouldn't turn on me the temperament. My customers, they would think I'm crazy altogether? My silk man, my button man, my embroidery man? They would run back to their office and one, two, three, chop off the credit. Seidman is going broke, they would say, he's making with the double talk.

All right, I got friends too. Pinochle friends. Poker friends. But to talk to, from the heart—nobody.

So, one day I'm looking out of the window in my shop and I got this feeling. This was depression time, business was very bad. So what should I do? Write to my Congressman? I go down to Solowey's Dairy Restaurant, I'm sitting having a cup of coffee, comes in and sits down at my table a man, big, maybe six feet, with a thick head of hair, grey, like chopped-up ice in a skating rink. He looks like he would be maybe a poet, a philosopher. So who is he? He's Max Birnbaum, Sally Simpson

Stylish Stouts. But this I don't know yet. He sits with his cup of coffee and he takes out of his pocket one of those little blue books, you don't see them round any more. You know what I mean? The little ones from Haldeman-Julius? They cost a nickel. I got an education from them.

Ah ha, I say to myself. Here is a man who is maybe talking my language. So I start up with him a conversation, pretty soon I'm quoting him a piece of poetry, Byron's, and he is conversing with me from Spinoza and we are having, I'm telling you, a time, you could almost forget the bills that are laying on the desk upstairs and the machinists complaining they haven't got enough work to make a decent day's pay, and you got to wonder every morning you're coming in the place, could you go on or will you have to close up.

So a funny thing, how life works. Where does this man live, he's like a lifesaver to me? Turns out, a block away from me in Parkside Towers. Can you imagine? Sunday, I take a walk over there with my wife, we should get acquainted. I don't want you should misunderstand me but I'm falling in love with Molly Birnbaum in one second net. Such a face she's got, so sweet, and such a tenderness between these two people. Like in a book. They got a lovely apartment, a lovely daughter, Naomi, there's a wonderful atmosphere in the house, you could feel it when people love each other, got respect for each other. We're sitting in the parlour, drinking tea, talking, and every minute Max jumps up and he says, "Molly, you want a pillow? Maybe you'd like better a rocker?" And so on.

You can imagine, when we're going home, my Sophie says to me, "What's the matter you can't bring me a rocker sometimes?" And I'm saying, "What's the matter you don't look at me like I was Sir Lancelot Seidman?" You understand, I'm just making a joke. We understand each other very fine, my Sophie and me.

Well, pretty soon I'm having lunch with Max every day, and three times a week we're at his house in the evening and four times a week they're at our house and one day I get an idea. "Max," I say, "we're spending so much time together, maybe we should make it unanimous? You got a business, I got a business, it's both lousy now, maybe if we put them together we could work out something."

So now you'll say, ah ha, here is the end of a beautiful friendship.

But that's where you are wrong. Eleven years we were partners, depression, wartime, not a single hard word, not a single argument. Between us, the feeling, like brothers. This was a kind of friendship comes to a person once in a lifetime. I had for Max respect, you see, besides everything else. You know, man is supposed to be a creature of God, you think He must have some hopes for them, like parents for their children. Well, sometimes, you're meeting a person, you think God must get from him for a change a little satisfaction. Not very often in this world. But sometimes.

Well, you know how in the Bible, in Paradise, came in one day the serpent? Only in the Bible it's a he and he's selling apples. This is a girl, with a refined accent, maybe twenty-three, four, she wants to be a model. Patricia O'Donel, and speaking without prejudice, she was a fine-looking girl. Blue eyes, dark hair, good figure, slim, very full in the bust. This is 1914, we're putting out a more expensive line that season and we decided to put on a couple more models. I don't know if you know the fashion business, maybe you think any girl, she's a little pretty, could be a model. But it's a profession, like to be an actor, or a singer. Doesn't take so much talent but you still got to have a certain style, and you got to have also some experience. And I see right away this girl don't qualify. She don't carry herself like she would understand how to show a dress. I ask her where did she work before, she tells me she never worked before, she comes from Ohio somewhere, she's in New York a couple months and she decided she wants to be a model.

Well, I take her name, she shouldn't feel too bad, but in my mind I already got her crossed off the list. But Max wants to give her the job. Why? Because she looks like she needs it.

"Listen, Max," I say, "we got a business here, after all, not a social service. This girl don't know how to walk even."

"Morris," he says, "do me a favour. I want to hire this girl. Give her a chance. I just got a feeling. Please."

"Okay," I say. "Why should I fight with you? You want to give her the job, give her the job."

So goes by a couple of weeks. The designer says Patricia learns fast, my shop foreman, Sam Rosenzweig, says she is very willing, and the salesmen are happy with her bust measurement. So fine.

On a Saturday, it's maybe a month after the girl came to work for us,

I'm in my office checking over some figures, Max comes in. "How does it look?" he says.

"Depends on who's asking," I say. "If it's the union delegate, the pay-roll is too high. You, I'll tell the truth. Keeps up like this, the Government is going to get rich."

So he says, "I'm glad to hear it. The Government wouldn't mind then I told the book-keeper to give Pat a ten-dollar rise."

"That's a pretty fast rise, Max," I say. "The girl's only been here a month. We're going to raise her salary every month?"

"She can use the money."

"And what's with our other models? They can use it too?"

"It's different with them," he says. "This is a very reserved girl, she's not going out for dinner every night with somebody else. She's got a small child, she's——"

"How is it you know so much already?" I ask him. "If she's so reserved, especially? The big one, Marcia, is here a year, you're still calling her Martha."

"There's something about this girl," he says. "The eyes. There is a sadness in them, Morris. Squeezes my heart. Didn't you notice?"

"Frankly, no," I say. "I got other things to notice round the place. The trouble with you is you are always mixing up business with sentiment."

He gives me a smile, with that wonderful face like an old-time prophet. "Look who's talking about sentiment," he says. "You are always trying to persuade yourself what a tough customer you are. But you're not fooling me, Morris." And he says to me, in Hebrew, from the Bible, "*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.*"

And I answer him back, also in Hebrew, "*Do you see a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings.*"

So he laughs and he goes away, shaking his head. Well, my partner tells me a girl has got sad eyes, he wants to give her a ten-dollar rise, the two don't go together exactly, but okay, if this is what he wants I'm not going to make an issue. It's not the ten dollars, you understand. I don't have to tell you, we were giving away plenty that time, for the refugees and so on. Maybe half the profits. But when you got an organization, you can't treat one person different than the other, starts up jealousies and so on.

Well, I'm trying to give you an idea, as good as I can remember, how

it's building up, the frame of mind, little by little. One time we had in the place photographs made, we're running an ad in *Women's Wear*. So we're looking at the prints, and I see Max is staring at one of the pictures like he would be hypnotized. It's a picture of Patricia in an evening dress, number 614, was one of our big numbers that season. To me, for my taste, the girl is too thin. But I got to admit, with the dress, she looks very stunning.

Max says, "You didn't know Molly in those days. But Pat reminds me of her so much. I couldn't tell you."

I give him a look like he would be crazy. Granted, this is a very pretty girl. But she looks as much like Molly as I look like Mickey Rooney. But, again, I'm not going to argue with him.

Then one day, about Thanksgiving, I come into the showroom, Max is sitting there alone by a table, he's making circles with a pencil on an order pad. "Morris," he says, "I got a problem."

"Well," I say, "you're talking to the right man. From problems I'm an expert." I don't even think it could be serious, his problem. Me, I'm feeling good, we just got in a big reorder from Carson Pirie, Chicago.

"It's Pat," he says, and all of a sudden it's like everything would fall into place in one of those picture puzzles, the rise, the business how she looks like Molly. "I want to get her a coat," he says. "And I don't know how to go about it."

It was like somebody would put an icicle down my back. "Max," I say, "you're out of your mind a little? Why do you want to start up a business with coats, with a model?"

"I can't stand to see the way she comes in in the morning," he says. "Blue from the cold. That coat she's wearing. Gaberdine. This is a spring coat. She must be freezing in it, this weather."

"All right," I say, "so if she needs a coat, why doesn't she go to the stores and buy one? There's not enough coats around?"

"I don't think she can afford it," he says.

"So let her buy it on time," I say. "Can be arranged."

He gives me now a look, like he just heard what I was saying. "You're getting hard, Morris," he says and he gets up and walks away, I'm standing, looking after him like he just threw ice-water in my face. Twelve years, it's the first bitter word between us.

Well, it's a few days later, there's a call from Max's daughter Naomi.

She is by the doctor and Molly's got to go to the hospital for a few days, for observation. She's got some kind of a condition, anaemia or something, she is subject to haemorrhages. The girl is upset, naturally, she's crying and she wants to talk to her father. Well, her father is not in the shop. I send a shipping clerk to see if he having coffee in Solowey's, he's not there. I call the buying offices, Saks, Lord and Taylor, everywhere. Nothing doing.

About four o'clock in the afternoon he comes in with a package and an expression on his face, you would think he's got in the package five of the biggest styles for next season.

"For heaven's sake, Max," I say, "how many times did I tell you? When you go out leave a number where you can be reached."

"I was in the building," he says. "I went up to see Charlie Aronson's line. They're making a beautiful line of coats this season." He opens the box and takes out a coat. "Isn't it a beauty? Genuine fox collar. A hundred and thirty-nine fifty, wholesale."

Well, you can believe me, I'm burning. "And I worked out how I'm going to do it," he says, like he's telling me I should give him a medal or something. "It'll be a Christmas present. From the firm. An honest girl can take such a present."

"Since when are we giving Christmas presents?" I ask him. "This is now *our* holiday, Christmas? Listen, Max, when you got a minute to stop being Santa Claus, maybe you'll go call your daughter. Molly's got to go to the hospital."

He drops the coat on a chair and his face gets grey like a piece of cardboard. So I'm already sorry, and I take hold of his arms and I say, "Put yourself together, Max. It's not serious. The doctor says he wants her to stay for a few days, for observation." And then I say, this much I can't help myself, "Please, Max. Next time, remember you got a family. Leave a number."

After he's gone, I'm thinking it over for a while. Then I take the coat into my office and I send for the girl. "Listen," I say to her, "here is a coat my partner bought for you. He couldn't give it to you personal, he's got sickness in the family, he had to go home." I'm looking at her meantime to see does she show maybe a little shame in her face. Nothing. She looks at the coat and she looks at me and she says, "But I don't understand. I'm sure it's very kind of Mr. Birnbaum—but——"

I'm interrupting her. "What's there to understand? He bought you a coat. I'm sure it's not the first time it happened to you." I see she's going to make an answer but I'm not waiting. "I want you should do me a favour," I say. "Take the coat, I'll give you a cheque for a month's salary, and you'll get yourself another job. Here it's a little crowded, too many models. You know what I mean?"

She can't even look me in the face. She's holding the coat, with the fur against her face, and now she's putting it down on a chair. She says, "I understand. Will you please thank Mr. Birnbaum? He'll understand why I can't take the coat. If you'll just give me my cheque until Saturday that will be satisfactory. I'll leave now."

So that night, I don't have to tell you, I'm not sleeping so good. It's true, the girl don't look the type to be a gold digger. But it's only in the movies the vampire looks like Theda Bara. Well, it's going round and round in my head like this, all night long. But I reckon I'll maybe have a bad time with Max in the morning and then it will be finished. To keep your best friend in the world from making a fool of himself, it's worth a little aggravation.

Next day, Max comes in about eleven o'clock, he stopped at the hospital, Molly had a good night, the doctor is very pleased. "So cheer up," I say. "She'll be home in a couple days."

He tries to smile. "Yes," he says. "Until next time." Then he goes into the showroom and pretty soon he comes back, his face is even more grey than before.

"Morris," he says, "what happened with Pat? The girls say she saw you yesterday and then packed up her things and left."

I'm not looking at him. I'm busy looking at some samples of silk. "I gave her the coat," I say. "She didn't want to take it."

"Why didn't she want to take it, Morris? Why?"

"I don't know. Maybe she's got bigger ideas," I say.

I look up at him and the way he's looking at me, it gives me a funny feeling in the stomach. "Morris," he says, "did you tell her it was a present from the firm?"

"I don't remember. I had other things on my mind, Max. I was thinking about Molly and what's going to be with her."

"Morris," he says, "I want to know what you said to Pat. Did you hurt her feelings?"

Now I'm getting angry. This is his only worry, did I hurt her feelings. "What did I say? I said she should get herself another job. That's what I said." I'm yelling now a little. What did I do after all? It was only to protect him.

"You had no right to talk to the girl that way," he tells me now. "You had no right to do things behind my back."

"Don't tell me what I got a right to do, Max," I say. "Better we should stop talking now. I don't want I should say things to you I'll be sorry later." And I pick up the samples and walk away.

The next day, Molly is coming home from the hospital, naturally Sophie is right away over there with the chicken soup. This is with our people a universal thing. You're sick, cascara before, chicken soup afterwards. I go over there later, in the evening. I'm trying to act like everything would be the same but it's no use, I can't look at Max, he can't look at me. So I sit for ten minutes, I got enough, I get up and I say I'm tired, I'm going home. Molly gives me a look, I know she's wondering what is wrong, I don't want to hurt her feelings but I can't help myself.

I got to give you now a conversation I had with my wife. I am staying in the shop this Saturday afternoon, it's quiet, it's a good time to catch up. So Sophie is coming down-town for some shopping, I meet her for lunch. You know, I got a very handsome wife. Maybe you remember in the old days was an actress, Clara Kimball Young? Well, my Sophie wouldn't have to take a back seat for her. I don't know why I mention this except maybe you should understand I got a certain feeling about marriage, pretty old-fashioned.

Well, we're talking over, at lunch, what Sophie wants to get for the kids, clothing, she wants also new curtains, I don't know what else, all of a sudden she says to me, "I've been thinking, Morris, I'd like to have a Christmas tree for the children this year."

I look at her, I wonder, is this some new wrinkle she got from the P.T.A., or some psychology lecture, or what?

"It's such a pretty thing to have in the house—why should we deprive Harold and Jenny——"

"Sophie," I say, "it's not our holiday, Christmas."

"Why not?" she says. "Do we close the door on Passover? Don't we keep it open, for the stranger?"

"It's not the same thing. For two thousand years——"

"Oh, don't start with the two thousand years," she says. "You just want to be stubborn. All Jenny's friends are going to have a tree, Myra Schwartz and Ellen Caplan and——"

"Don't give me the list," I say. "I know there's plenty Jews would like to forget they're Jews. That's their privilege. Doesn't mean we have to do it too." I see she's going to keep on so I say, "I don't want any more discussions about it. No tree."

Well, I'm a little aggravated when I get back in the shop. I don't like to have to be a tyrant in the house. For me it's a question of principle. But how do I know, after all, I'm right? Maybe it's wrong, to keep always alive the differences. I realize prejudice could work two ways. I'm having these thoughts when I come into the office and I see Max is there, looking out of the window.

"What's the matter you're still here?" I say. He don't answer. I take down an order book, and I go to work. Pretty soon Max says, "Morris, do you remember the day we met, in Solowey's?"

"I remember," I say. I look up at him. "So?"

"Morris, why don't we understand each other any more?"

It's giving me again a twist inside, like from a rope. "What is there to understand?" I say. "You want to make a fool of yourself and I can't stand to look on it. That's all."

"Morris," he says, "have you ever been all alone in the world?"

Well, sometimes I had thoughts like that too, I told you. But instead I should feel sympathetic with him, I'm only getting angry. "What's the matter you're all of a sudden so alone?" I ask him. "There's only Molly and Naomi and your relatives and——"

"People," he says. "All of us. Locked up in our own bodies. Our own minds. We're alone, Morris. Every important minute of our lives, living, dying, we're alone."

I know who he's thinking about. And I know what else he's thinking. He's thinking how sorry he is for himself, with a wife he ought to be glad just to worship her, like a statue on a pedestal.

"Listen," I say, "I haven't got time for such deep thoughts. I got a business to run and a family to support. And any spare time I got, I could think about people over in Europe, Mr. Hitler fixed it for them so they could all be together for ever, in the gas chambers. This is what I'm thinking about, if I got time to brood about who's lonely in the

world." The more I'm talking the more I'm getting worked up. "Twelve years I know you, you weren't lonely," I say. "Now comes in a girl with long legs and an Irish face and all of a sudden you're lonely. Why don't you go home to your wife and daughter if you're lonely?"

He looks at me. "You had a heart once, Morris. What happened to it? Maybe you lost it? In those order books somewhere?"

I'm picking up the order books and slamming them down on my desk. "I didn't lose nothing," I say. "Only my patience. I got my same heart, but I ain't got room in it for suckers. Or for models who got to be unlonely with married men."

It's a peculiar feeling, you know, you're saying something to a friend, you know you wouldn't ever be able to take it back. You don't want to say it and yet you got to. My heart is knocking in my chest like I would be gambling away a fortune. I'm waiting for him to answer me. I look round, Max isn't there any more. And inside I got such a weak feeling I got to sit down, like I was maybe running for a hundred blocks.

It's a misery, the next days. In the place we're avoiding each other, at home, Molly can't understand what is going on, she is on the phone every evening, why don't we come over? I got to make always an excuse. My Sophie wants to send me to a doctor altogether to find out what's the matter, I don't look good.

Well, a situation like this you decide the next thing is to call in the lawyers and dissolve the partnership. You hear about such things every day in Seventh Avenue. But when it's happening to you, believe me, it's a different story. Such a miserable feeling, I couldn't tell you. And the middle of everything, it's now the Christmas season, people running round, busy, happy faces, and your own heart is heavy like lead. Well, you're a writer. It's like a regular play, no?

All right, so now is the last act. One morning, it's a few days before Christmas, I go into the showroom, I see a box is open there on a table, there's a housecoat in it, quilted, dusty pink, very fine material, satin. Happens I'd seen in the morning Max come in with a box, I think this must be it, and I make up my mind. It's an opportunity, like to open a closed door. I go into Max's office and I say, "What's that housecoat laying on the table in the showroom?"

"It's for Molly," he says. "A present." He's having the same trouble as me. But he wants also to try.

"It's a nice garment," I say. "Maybe I'll get one for Sophie. Where did you get it? Bonwit's?"

"I think Saks," he says.

"What do you mean, you *think* Saks?"

He gives me a look and I'm getting that funny feeling in the stomach again. "Pat bought it," he says. It's like he would hit me on the head. Pat bought it! This man, with his face from the Bible, he lost himself so entirely, he's sending Pat now to buy presents for Molly. I'm disgusted but I'm holding myself in.

"Maybe you got an idea how much Pat paid for it?" I say. "Or she's got her own charge account now?"

Like he's very tired, he says, "Twenty-nine fifty, Morris."

"Thank you very much," I say and I turn round and walk out. Lunch-time the designer comes to me, she wants me to go with her to Fifth Avenue, there's a dress in a store, she thinks somebody copied it from us. Well, this is entirely possible. Since we copied it from somebody, somebody else could copy it from us. The only thing, if they're making it cheaper, I want to see how, so I could at least give my production man the needle. Well, we're passing by a window at Saks, I forget all about the dress. I see Max's housecoat, only a different colour. All of a sudden seems to me very funny the price he told me. You could see it's a very high-class number, expensive satin, quilting, handwork, it's not possible they could sell it for twenty-nine fifty retail. I ask the designer, she agrees with me. We go into the store and inquire. Eighty-nine fifty.

Well, it bothers me all afternoon. I don't like mysteries. In a book, yes, or on the television. Not in my own head. So I go to the file finally, I take out Patricia O'Donel's card. No telephone number. Only an address: Hundred and Thirty-eighth Street.

Well, I got more important things to do than go all the way up to Hundred and Thirty-eighth Street to ask a person how is it she paid twenty-nine fifty for an eighty-nine-fifty housecoat. Maybe she knows somebody. Maybe she is a great bargainer. Maybe I'm getting to be a busybody. So four o'clock, I go uptown to Hundred and Thirty-eighth Street. Am I crazy? I don't know. I only know I got to find out the explanation or I wouldn't sleep.

I find the house, it don't look very classy. And the neighbourhood is not what you would call high-class residential. On the mail-box I find

P. O'Donel, Apartment 10, third floor. I walk up and ring the bell and a woman opens the door, thin, looks like a schoolteacher. "Is this Miss O'Donel's apartment?" I say.

"She's not home at the moment," the woman says. "I'm her neighbour. I mind her boy while she's away."

Now from inside comes up to the door a boy in a sweater, like a little prize fighter, his pants are falling down a little, the whole person is maybe two years old. He starts pulling on the woman and she holds him and says to me, "You want to wait? She'll be home any minute." Well, I'm feeling a little funny. It's already a little strange, with the neighbourhood and the apartment and in my head was an idea, maybe even a hope, I would find something altogether different, a fancy apartment, furs, servants—you know, a love nest.

Well, the boy keeps pulling on the woman's skirt, in his other hand he's holding a toy. "He wants me to tell him a story," the woman explains me, just like I never had kids of my own.

"Lamb," he hollers. She picks him up and I can see he's something to pick up, solid like a little giant. He holds out to me the toy, it's a sheep, made from cotton, and half of it is pulled out, pretty soon it will be bald altogether. So I take it, I look at it. "Mary, lamb," he hollers. He starts to wriggle so the woman's got to put him down. So now he grabs my finger and starts to pull me in, and the woman laughs and says, "Now, Kevin, it's not polite to act that way with the gentleman."

What does he know about polite? He's got a fixed idea in his head and I see now where he's pulling me. In a corner of the room there is a Christmas tree, a little one, with maybe a dozen balls hanging and on the floor is a cardboard box with straw and little figures round and I see my problem already. It's not Mary had a little lamb, this is another Mary and another story. And for this story he's got the wrong customer. Morris Seidman ain't the man for the job.

He keeps on hollering, "Lamb, lamb." The woman says, "Now, Kevin, let the gentleman alone." But he's holding on to me like with a pliers and I don't know how it is with you but me, a child takes hold of my finger and he looks up at me with his round face, it's so shiny it hurts your eyes—well, I'm finished. I don't know what to do, he only wants I should tell him the story. So what am I going to tell him? Once upon a time there was a Jewish girl, and she had a child, she had to

have it in a stable, and for two thousand years we haven't heard the end of it? I'm telling you, my father, the cantor, he should rest in peace, he would have seen me in this situation he would drop dead all over again.

Well, my good fortune, just then the door opens and Pat comes in. She don't even see anything in the room, only the boy. "Kevin," she says to him, and the boy is scootling over. She gives him a hug and says, "Martha, how was it this afternoon?" And then she sees me and her face gets a little pale. "Mr. Seidman," she says. "What is it? Is anything wrong with Max—Mr. Birnbaum?"

"Nothing," I say. "I just got a question, something I couldn't work out, maybe you could explain me."

She looks at me, then she turns to the woman, she says, "Thank you, Martha. Do you mind if I give you the money tomorrow?"

And the woman says, "That's all right, Mrs. O'Donel. Kevin was a good boy today," and she gives him a squeeze and goes out.

"What is it you want to know, Mr. Seidman?" Pat says, and she takes off meanwhile her hat and coat. I can see her back is stiff, she's not intending to make this easy for me. I'm still trying to work out, what is the angle here? Couldn't be just what I see, a young working woman trying to get along, with a small child, a poor apartment. Please. Got to be an angle. Couldn't be I've been crazy all these weeks, building up a fantasy. . . .

"It'll maybe sound to you foolish," I say, "but I understand you bought a housecoat for Mrs. Birnbaum——"

She hears this she turns round, quick. "Isn't it all right? Max gave me the size——"

"It's fine, the size," I say. "It's fine, the whole coat. First-class workmanship. I thought I would get one for my wife too. Not a Christmas present, you understand. We don't give presents, Christmas. It's not our holiday."

I'm waiting to see, will she say something. But she doesn't. She just looks at me very straight.

"Some Jews are forgetting this," I say. "They think maybe it's like being a member of a club, to be a Jew. You could drop out by changing your name or putting up a tree in the living-room."

"Christmas is something very precious and beautiful to us, Mr. Seidman," Pat says. "I'm sorry if others can't share it."

"Well, anyway," I say, "Christmas or not, I would like to buy a nice coat, a present, for my wife. You got it at Saks?"

"Yes." That's all. Yes.

"So I went to Saks," I say. "I priced it. Eighty-nine fifty they want. Max told me you paid only twenty-nine fifty."

I see she's getting now a little red in the face. "Did you tell Max?" she says.

"No. I wanted to ask you first. If you don't mind."

She picks up from the table a packet of cigarettes, she takes out one and starts to knock it against the table.

"So how about it?" I'm still hoping there's some answer. Not just that I'm an idiot, a mean-hearted idiot. "You got it maybe somewhere wholesale and put it in a Saks box? Or maybe somebody gave it to you for a present? And you didn't want to keep it?"

She gives me now a look, like I would be on exhibit. "You have a rather low regard for people, don't you, Mr. Seidman? Are you in the habit of selling the gifts people make you?"

"I'm not accusing you anything," I say. Not much! "I just want to find out."

She keeps knocking the cigarette on the table. "Frankly," she says, "I don't think it's any of your business. But since you troubled to come all the way up here, Max gave me a cheque for a hundred dollars to buy something for myself and Kevin for Christmas. I didn't feel right about it. But I knew he would get so hurt if I said anything about it, I just couldn't refuse. So I told Max I'd feel better about accepting the money if he'd agree to my dividing it in three, and getting something for Mrs. Birnbaum too. That's all."

That's all, she says. "But in three is thirty-three dollars," I say. "All right, so it's twenty-nine fifty, like you say. But in the store the coat is eighty-nine fifty."

"I couldn't find anything really nice for less," she says. "And I wanted something very nice for Mrs. Birnbaum."

It's like bells are ringing in my head now. "You mean, you spent the whole thing? The whole hundred dollars for Molly?"

"Well, not the whole thing. Just eighty-nine fifty."

"And what's with the tax?" I say.

She smiles. "There was enough left over to buy that crèche for Kevin.

I think Max would like him to have it." She's looking me straight in the eyes. "He seems to feel differently about Christmas than you do."

Yes. About Christmas. About a lot of things.

"Now I've told you," she says. "And please don't tell Max."

Well, there's only one thing would help me now, if I could find a place to fall through the floor. I'm getting somehow all mixed up with my hat and my coat, my hat is falling down, I'm starting to pick it up, then some papers fall out of my coat pocket and she helps me pick them up. So finally, finally, I'm starting to walk to the door, it's like I was there a year already. "You'll pardon me," I say, "for butting in like this——"

"That's all right," she says. "I'm sorry you had to trouble. I've been trying to get a phone put in. They told me at the plant that I was entitled to one as a defence worker."

"You're not modelling any more?"

"No. At the moment I feel better doing something with my hands. I feel as if I'm contributing something."

The boy comes up again with the sheep. "Lamb, lamb," he says.

I look down at him, that little shiny face that don't know nothing except he wants a story, he don't know the trouble stories can make in the world, he don't know from jealousy, from caring for a person so much that you get a sickness in the head from it. "That's a fine boy you got," I say. "That's his father?" I noticed the picture before, by the tree.

"Yes, that's Kevin's father. He was killed last year. In Italy. It hasn't been easy for Kevin."

"And what's with you?" I say. "For you it's been easy?"

She gives a funny smile. "Well, not exactly. New York's not an easy place to make friends. Except the kind you have to hold off with a club. That's one of the reasons I gave up modelling too. It's meant a great deal to Kevin and me, having someone like Max and Molly take an interest in us."

"Molly," I say. "You know her?"

"She's been up here with Max, to visit. She's a lovely person. She's been so sweet to Kevin. I've never known anyone quite like them—anyone so really good." And then she says, like she's talking to the boy, not to me, "Max thinks the world of you, Mr. Seidman. I'm afraid you've made him very unhappy."



"Yes," I say. I'm looking down at the boy with his little sheep in his hand and I look over at the box with the straw and the cradle and the Wise Men, and I'm thinking, what is it with people, year in and year out, century after century? The door is open and they are standing always outside, in the dust, in the dark.

"Pat," I say, "you want to make me a big Christmas present? Tell me you'll excuse me, how terrible I misjudged you."

"Are you sure you did?" she says. She looks me straight in the face and I see that Max was right, it's something round the eyes, the same kind of sweet expression like Molly. "I'm in love with Max, Mr. Seidman," she says. "It's with me every minute of the day. And every minute of the night."

It's a funny thing, it's like I would know this already. Only all of a sudden I got a telegram: *Repent. I gave you the power to love. And all you did was judge.*

"I wish it could bring you happiness, Pat," I say.

"It has," she says. "In a strange way. You know, the only really terrible thing is to feel nothing. Not even longing."

So I can't say anything for a minute, it's like my throat would be full of chalk. Then I say, "Pat, maybe you would do me a favour. I'm going to get this Christmas a tree for my kids. Would you come to our house Sunday, maybe show Mrs. Seidman how to make with the decorations? And bring the boy? It's a few years since we had a small child in the house. Will be a big treat for us."

She looks at me a minute, then she says, "We'll be glad to come."

"You know Max lives only a couple blocks from me," I say.

"I know," she says. "I hope Molly will like the coat. I wasn't sure of the colour."

I put out my hand and take hers, I wish I would have the nerve to put it against my heart. "She'll like it, Pat," I say. "It's a beautiful thing. I wish she could know how beautiful."

Well, you didn't expect to get a whole *megillah* like this about Christmas, hah? But I guess you can understand, I got a full heart on account of the news about my son. I wish I could say to everybody, this Christmas, put away the hatred, put away the misunderstanding, it should mean something in the world, finally, finally, peace on earth, good will to men.

THREE

COME IN, come in, I'm glad to see you, sit down please, make yourself comfortable, can I get you something, a drink, a cup of coffee, I'll send down. Yes, I've been thinking what you said. Naturally I'm flattered a big national magazine should want to publish an article about me. But what's to write about? If I was a politician with big plans how to make more of a mish-mash in the world than there is already—but a dress manufacturer? I could write you the whole story in three words: styles, bicarbonate of soda and aggravation.

And this title you told me on the telephone, "Dior to the Masses." I'm blushing every time I think about it. I don't like people should think I'm blowing myself up with big ideas. Dior at least is a genius. But me, I had only a little luck. Happened, a few years ago, I got fixed in my head an idea that a working girl with thirty dollars that she saved up for a new dress wants just as much to be smart, to make a big impression, as a society lady who drives up to Bonwit's in a Rolls Royce. This is not "Dior to the Masses." It's simply a businessman's idea.

You want to say I took a gamble, this is true. I had a good business, I was making a nice living, I got all of a sudden this ambition to have a Style Show with dresses that retail for twenty-nine fifty, to make this a big fashion event, with beautiful models and champagne, just like they are doing with individual-designed dresses for five hundred. Lots of people thought I was crazy. You should have heard my sister Bessie those days. I was insane, I would land in the poorhouse, with the children together.

Well, wasn't so bad. I made a success. People are coming now from all over to my Style Shows, even from Australia. But I'll tell you something, to this day I'm still reaching for the aspirin in my desk. I'm still getting up sometimes in the middle of the night, sweating, I'm afraid, I don't know of what. And in the shop, so it's on a bigger scale now but it's still the same business, the same problems, the same aggravations. If I want to go away for a while, I still got to worry what's going to be while I'm gone. Or maybe I don't have to worry. But I worry. You know what I mean?

My son? Well, this I couldn't answer you in one word. I had for him other ambitions than to be a dress manufacturer. You know, a lawyer, a doctor, something in the professions. But three years in the army, away from home, it changes a boy. You couldn't expect he should come back the same as when he went away. I'll tell you the truth, the problems we had with him a few months after he got back from Korea, I thought I would lose my mind. It's anyway a touchy situation with the children nowadays. You're reading every day in the papers, what's going on with the young generation, hot rods, gambling, dope, stealing, killing. I suppose in my young days it was the same thing, different names only. But who had time to notice? I came over to this country, I was thirteen years old, right away I had to make a living. Not next week. Next day, if we wanted to eat. So I had a job in a grocer's in the morning, in the afternoon delivering for a florist and three times a week, in the evening, pin boy in a bowling alley. The rest of the time I had for myself, except when I would go to night school. You know what was my biggest problem those days? How to sit on the bench at night school so the teacher shouldn't know I'm catching up a little sleep. We had in the neighbourhood, I remember, loafers too. I'll tell you the truth, I would maybe have liked to be one myself. But the first thing, my mother wouldn't let me. She was a plain woman, she had for the children plain ambitions. A lawyer, doctor, violinist, yes. A loafer, no.

I was twenty, I was engaged, I didn't know a thing. Ignorant, like from a convent. Who knew about sex? Until I left night school I thought it was a department store in Fifth Avenue. Me, I only followed my heart, like they say. And I am a happy man, married twenty-seven years. Sophie and me, we got yet to have our first real quarrel, we got two beautiful children, nobody had to explain us how.

All right, I'm not saying for everybody it's got to be the same way. Happens, a person like me, monogamy fits me like a glove, but live and let live, that's my motto. Only a person should have a little dignity about himself, a little self-respect. I have sometimes an argument with my star salesman, Larry Kogen, about this—like when I got to throw cold water on a customer who wants to make dates with the models. He says to me, "Morris, you're a regular pamphlet from the Y.M.C.A. Tell me, you've been married almost thirty years. Vanilla, vanilla,

vanilla. Don't you ever get tired? Wouldn't you like to try maybe a little strawberry?"

"Larry," I say, "you got a big territory for jokes. The President, Congress, Jews—okay. But me and my love life, leave us out of it. I got in the world one place where I would like to keep the respect. My home and my family. Please."

So he gives me a look like I would be something in a cage and he says, "Morris, either you are the biggest faker that ever lived, or you belong in a book."

"I'm in a book," I say. "Dun and Bradstreet. I would like to be a hero there, with a triple-A rating."

Well, he's not a bad boy, Larry. Good-hearted, he would give you the shirt off my back. But you were asking me about my son, the problems I mentioned. You want to hear? Me, I don't mind at all. I'd like to go over it again, it was such a peculiar situation, it wasn't only Harold who was mixed up. I was plenty confused myself.

So. I got to give you a scene in the house when we got the letter from Harold that he was coming home, definite, from Korea. You can imagine, it's quite an excitement. I'm trying to hold myself in, one person in the family at least should keep a perspective. I say to my wife, "Listen, Sophie, you are the one who's always making with the psychology, I want to say just one thing. It's going to be a big temptation for us to make a fuss over Harold, like he was a baby. But we got to remember, he's a young man now. Twenty-one years old. We got to control ourself."

So what is her answer? "*You* control yourself," she says. "I'm going to clean him up a little, three years in the army, I can imagine, and I'm going to make him a devil's-food cake and I'm going to watch him eat the whole thing, with two quarts of milk. And you know what else? I'm going to tuck him in at night."

I say, "Listen to me, Sophie. I want you should use some judgment. Your baby is going to vote in the next election. He's a citizen. You realize what that is?"

"Yes," she says, "it's someone I'm going to clean up a little, make him a devil's-food cake and tuck him in at night." Her eyes are like stars in her face, shining. A very handsome woman, my Sophie. And sassy too, believe me. "What's the matter," she says, "you're jealous?"

"Not yet," I say, "but you'll show me the chapter in Mr. Freud, I'll read it, maybe I'll work myself up to it."

So we both got to laugh finally. I put my arm round her, we are dreaming a little, you know, the things a parent is remembering, a sled, a graduation, the first time he put on a tuxedo. . . . Well, it's a funny feeling when he comes down from the plane, all of a sudden so tall in his uniform, he looks maybe seven feet, it's already too much, you know, with a father who is altogether five six and a quarter with stockings. What happened all of a sudden? Who changed the bobbin in the machine? I turned my head away a second and the boy is gone and now I got to shake hands with Lieutenant Seidman, a fine-looking young man but are we acquainted?

Don't misunderstand me. This is not a tragedy, a boy comes home from the army, a soldier, straight, tall, handsome. But I'm thinking very serious now. It's a long time I didn't have a real talk with Harold. For three years, only letters. What can you say in a letter? All I know is my Harold is a good boy, a clean boy, a serious boy. A parent can have from such a son nothing but pleasure.

Well, in the house, you can imagine. Samson we got to give a phenobarbital altogether. This dog, it's either he's scratching himself to death from worry, or else he is shaking himself to death with happiness. My daughter, Jenny, is right away pestering Harold, what did he bring home, souvenirs, what about the Korean girls, are they pretty. And Harold is very patient, yes, he says, the Korean girls are pretty, some of them are beautiful and he looks for a minute with far-away eyes, you would maybe think he's thinking about somebody particular. So Sophie says, "Jenny, let him alone already with the Korean girls." And to Harold she says, "How about tasting a piece of cake. I made it special for you."

"Later, Mom," he says, "but I will have some more coffee."

"You had three cups already," she says, "and nothing to eat."

"Sophie, stop bothering him," I say. "He's twenty-one."

But Harold puts an arm round his mother, he says, "Never mind, Pop. Feels wonderful for a change, to be fussed over."

Just now the bell rings, the first one of the family is arriving. So who is it? My sister Bessie and her husband, Myron, she's practically screaming, "So where's the General?" She comes in, she's got on a



special hat for the occasion. This woman, with her hats, you could have a conniption. "Look, look," she hollers across the room to Harold. "A regular movie actor he became."

"So tell me, Harold," Myron says. "Is it true about the Korean girls?"

This is a very subtle fellow, you understand. A real member of the intelligentsia. Bessie gives him a look, you could fry an egg on it, then she says to Harold, "Let me look at you already."

So Harold goes over to his aunt, he gives her a kiss, then he says, "How are things in the old neighbourhood, Aunt Bessie?"

"What old neighbourhood," she says. "There's no more old neighbourhood. There's only immigrants and more immigrants."

I see Harold and Jenny give each other a look.



Harold says, "What do you mean, immigrants, Aunt Bessie?"

"They turned the whole West Side into a slum," she says. "They ought to send them all back where they came from."

Harold says, "You mean us immigrants too?"

"What are you talking about?" Bessie says. "We came over, we tried to better ourselves, give the children an education, improve things. But Porto Ricans, what do they know? Kids running round all night, with knives, dope——"

"Listen," I say, "stop already. I got Porto Ricans working for me in the shop. Simple, nice people, good workers——"

"Sure," she says, "for you it's fine. You don't have to live with them. Eight, nine, ten people in an apartment——"

So Harold raises now his voice. "Aunt Bessie, you think they *like* to live that way?"

Sophie sees it's going to be trouble pretty soon so she takes Bessie's arm. "Come on," Sophie says, "have some coffee and a piece of cake. It's delicious." And she takes her away to the dining-room.

Harold says, "I'm sorry I let go, Pop. Guess I'll have to start learning manners all over again."

"From her?" Jenny says.

Well, I got to agree, even if she's fresh. This kind of an education Harold doesn't need. So I take his arm and say, "By the way, speaking

of education. You thought maybe a little about college while you were away? I wrote away to some places, I got forms for you to fill in, applications, you'll look them over——"

"Not yet a while, Pop. I'd like to look round a bit, get oriented."

"Oriented?" I say. "You didn't have enough of the Orient?"

Well, it's getting fixed in my mind now that something is different with Harold. True, I'm prepared there should be some difference. Harold has been a soldier, he had some pretty tough times over there too. One thing I notice. He had all the time such a quick sunny smile. Like the world's got nothing for him but surprise packages waiting. Now it comes out slow, like he's got something else on his mind, he's remembering something for which a smile isn't the answer. You know what I mean? The first thing, I decide I got to get him outfitted with some clothes. So I say, "Come down to the place tomorrow, we'll have lunch, and buy some things for you."

Next morning, he comes in, I'm having a conference with a certain Mr. Wilenski, a delegate from the union, a very fine gentleman, you could get from him in five minutes an ulcer. It's got to do with the price on certain new numbers we're putting in the line, I mean the price for labour, machining, cutting, finishing, pressing—this is in our business a very crucial thing, you know. If you can't work out a reasonable price for labour, you can't make the dress. I mean, you can make it but you will lose money. So you're having on every dress, besides the headaches you got in the first place, to get the style, the material, the customers, the deliveries—you also got to have a Geneva Conference with the delegate from the union to decide what is a fair price. And for him a fair price is the retail price of the garment, divided among the workers, plus a bonus, two weeks' holiday for everybody including the officers of the union and his own grandchildren, and besides this, I should turn over my stocks and insurance policies.

So I'm standing with this Wilenski, and Miss Youssef, my designer, and my production man, Sam Rosenzweig, and a model, Marie Anderson, a lovely girl, she's got on the dress in question but nobody is looking at it any more, we are too busy arguing. Harold comes in, I introduce him, and when I come to Wilenski I say, "You maybe heard about Mr. Wilenski in the army. He is from the Blood Bank Department, from the union."

"Mr. Seidman," he says, "no insults. You'll start with the insults, I'm walking out."

"So walk," I say. "Who are you threatening?"

"I'm not threatening," he says. "I'm just saying. No insults."

"You are not going to stop me from talking, Mr. Wilenski," I tell him. "Make up your mind. You want to walk, walk. It'll be good for you, a little walking. You're getting anyway too fat."

Well, I see Harold is looking at Marie, she's something to see, a beautiful girl and a fine girl too, and they're smiling, the two young people, but I see Harold is a little embarrassed and I realize, in the garment business, shouting is a natural tone of voice and an insult is like for somebody else saying "*Gesundheit*," but if you're not in the business you could think maybe somebody is going to get killed. So I say to Marie, "Show my son round the place, introduce him to the other models, it'll be more interesting for him than to stand and watch Mr. Wilenski extract from me a quart of blood."

So Wilenski says, "I told you, Mr. Seidman, stop with the insults."

"And I told you," I say, "if I got to take orders from you, I'll sell out the business altogether and go raise oranges in California."

"Please," Miss Youssem says, "can we talk about number 712. I can't understand, Mr. Wilenski, how you can come up with a price of four dollars for the machinists, for four seams and——"

"There's five seams," Rosenzweig says.

"Are you telling me how many seams there are," she says. "I only designed the dress."

"And I'm only the production man," Rosenzweig says, "and number 712 has got five seams."

"And I'm only the boss," I say, "and you are both wrong. You're talking about two different styles. 712 is the light-weight wool, with the dropped waist at the back."

"In my book, it's marked 713," Miss Youssem says.

"So I changed the number," I say.

"Well, I wish somebody would tell me these things," she says. "There are enough other ways of losing one's mind round here."

Well, this is just to give you an idea, what goes on. We're arguing for about an hour, finally we get the price settled and Wilenski says to me, "You want to come down, have a bite with me at Solowey's?" and I

say, "You are taking no chances with this invitation, you know whenever I got to talk to you I can't eat afterwards for two days."

So after a while Harold and I go for lunch, and then we start to walk towards Forty-first Street, there's a Rogers Peet, I traded there for many years. I see Harold is looking round and I say, "Looks pretty good to you now, hah? New York?"

"Yeah, pretty good," he says. "What was this stuff Aunt Bessie was giving me about the Porto Ricans ruining the neighbourhood?"

"Well, ruining I don't know," I say. "It was pretty ruined already. But it's a big problem, no question."

I see right away he don't like my remark. "How do you mean?" he says. "Why are Porto Ricans more of a problem than anybody else?"

"Harold," I say, "let's not start up again an argument. I got nothing against Porto Ricans, personally. But facts are facts. You take people from their own country where they're living in a certain way, with certain ideas, you bring them over here, an entirely new environment, you got to have problems. That's all I'm saying."

"So what are you going to do? Shut the door on them? Happens Porto Ricans are citizens. They're entitled to go where they want."

"I'm not stopping them," I say. "Let's go in here already and look at a suit."

"Besides," he says, "people aren't just statistics. They suffer when they're hungry. They die when they haven't a little hope. This country got big and great on its immigrants. If they bring problems, we've got to take hold and solve them, that's all."

"Harold," I say, "you just got back from solving the Korean problem. Give yourself a couple days' rest at least before tackling the Porto Rican question."

So he stops now and he gives me a grin, a little lop-sided, and he says, "I'm sorry, Pop. I didn't mean to sound like a wise guy with all the answers. But I spent three years of my life, listening to a lot of stupid talk about gooks——"

"Please, Harold," I say, "you didn't hear from me no gook talk. You think I don't know on the same list with 'gook' is 'kike'?"

So he gives my arm a squeeze, and we go in the store. The salesman, Mr. Peters, knows Harold from when I was buying him short pants, and he makes a big fuss over him. Harold is again polite, with that

smile on his face like he's a thousand miles away. Mr. Peters shows him jackets, very nice, one after another, finally he tries one on, grey cashmere, he looks wonderful in it, I shouldn't say it I'm his father but he looks sometimes terrible handsome, this boy. He goes to the mirror, he stands there a minute. "This is one of our custom models," Mr. Peters says. "It's been reduced to a hundred and ten dollars."

I see Harold gets a funny look on his face, he turns away from the mirror and takes off the jacket. "Pop," he says, "do you mind? I just don't feel like looking at clothes today. I'm sorry, Mr. Peters," he says to the salesman, "I'll be back some other time." And he don't even wait for me, he walks out of the door.

I'm walking along with him back to the place, I don't know what to say to him, he's acting so peculiar. Finally, back in the office, he turns to me, he says, "I guess you must think I'm a little cracked, Pop. I liked that cashmere number a lot."

"So?" I say.

"So," he says. "I wish I knew just how to explain. You know the kind of things you think about when you're sitting in a dug-out; or bouncing along in a jeep? Corned-beef sandwiches, or rummaging round a second-hand record shop, looking for old Ella Fitzgerald records—well, one of my dreams was getting into expensive clothes again—and here I am, decked out in a hundred and ten dollars' worth of cashmere, and all I can think of are people I saw on a road in Korea, women, kids, fighting over scraps that fell off our garbage trucks. The price of that one jacket would feed I don't know how many of them, for a year. I'd rather buy one for thirty dollars and feed a few hungry people over there with the rest."

So now I'm getting a little annoyed and I say, "Harold, you've been home twenty-four hours, already you gave a couple of lectures, sociology—now you're going to give me a lecture how to spend my money? You got to be dressed, no? You're going to sit waiting for opportunity in your underwear?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you angry. Let's just skip it."

"I'm not angry," I say. "You're a young man, you're entitled to your own ideas. But now that we're talking, what about college? You want to skip that too?"

"I don't know," he says, twisting up his face like when he was a little

boy, thinking. "I always thought when I came back I'd go back to school, go on to become a lawyer or a doctor. But I don't know any more. I'd like my life to count for something more than that."

"Harold," I say, "a doctor doesn't count for something?"

"I suppose so," he says. "But I'd like to do something about the real sickness of the world—war, poverty, injustice."

Well, I don't want to tell Harold he is talking like a fool, I don't want to show him how disappointed I'm feeling, still I can't help saying, "You mean you want to be a doctor to the whole world. You wouldn't be satisfied with just separate countries?"

So he puts on his face this new-type smile, it's like a piece of haberdashery he picked up somewhere to cover his face. "I think I'll shove off, Pop," he says. "You must have lots of things to do."

He goes to the door just as Marie opens it and comes in. She's got on a little tailored suit from the new line, and she looks like a doll. "Oh, I'm sorry," she says, "I didn't mean to interrupt. Miss Youssem just wanted you to see how this looks on."

"Very pretty," Harold says. "You ought to sell a million." He gives her a smile and she gives him one back, and he goes out.

"My, he's good-looking, Mr. Seidman," she says. "Is he coming into the business?"

"I wish I would know what he's going to do," I say. "You talked to him a little, Marie? What is your impression? To me he seems very confused. No?"

"It must be a little strange for them, Mr. Seidman," she says. "Coming back. I mean—capturing a hill. Staying alive. Staying warm. And then back to a world where relationships are a kind of minuet. Or masked ball. It's not surprising if they've lost the rhythm. Or don't think it's very important." I look at her, I wonder from where does this lovely girl get such wisdom. Maybe twenty years old.

"But he doesn't seem the sort of boy you'd have to worry about," she says. "The girls all think he's terribly nice."

So from feeling rotten, she is making me feel now pretty good. And I make with myself a resolution. From now on I'm going to let him alone. Let him find his own way, whatever he wants. It's a fine resolution, no? Still, I'm expecting there will be a *little* communication between us. But nothing. I get home in the evening, he's sitting in his room

with the door closed, the typewriter is going a mile a minute—this boy, whatever he does, even typing, it's like for a prize. What is he writing? He don't say and I don't ask. I'm sticking to it. Hands off.

I got to give you now a scene, in the morning, breakfast. The postman rings, Gladys, the maid, goes to the door, brings in the mail, Harold right away grabs, looks for himself, takes out a letter. He opens it, looks at it quick, then he puts it away in his pocket and starts to eat his egg like it was made of rubber chopped in with a little sawdust. And all of a sudden I got enough, being a diplomat. This is not a star boarder in my house and I'm not Lord Chesterfield.

I say to him, "Harold, what's in the letter?"

"The letter?" he says. "Oh, nothing."

"I'll bet it's from a babe," Jenny says.

"I want everybody in this house to change the subject," Sophie says. "Immediately. A letter is a private thing."

"It's not that private, Mom," Harold says. "I just don't see any point in talking about it, at the moment."

"So when could you see the point?" I ask him. "You're home already quite a few weeks. Maybe you could give us a date when you're going to start acting human again?" So he jumps up from the table. "You're not finished," I say. "Sit down and eat your breakfast."

"I don't want any more," he says. "Do you mind?"

"Yes, I mind," I say. "And if it will make it easier for you to remember where you are and who you are, you can call me colonel. Or general. Sit down."

So now comes in Gladys, she knows always the right time to put in her two cents' worth. "You want some more coffee, Colonel?" she says.

"Listen, my dear woman," I answer her, "when you came to us eleven years ago, you weighed maybe ninety-eight pounds. Now you weigh a hundred and ninety-eight and this I'll tell you, the next hundred pounds ain't going to be so easy for you, if you don't show a little respect for who's running this house."

"Yes, sir, General," she says. "I got nothing but respect for Mrs. Seidman," and Jenny is spitting out half her coffee in her napkin and I'll tell you the truth, I got to hold myself in also, I shouldn't laugh. This is a character, this Gladys.

Sometimes I'm thinking the coloured poeple and the Jews got a lot in

common, I don't mean only broken heads. But the songs, the humour, the way they are thinking. Anyway, Harold is standing by the table, and Gladys says to him, "Those eggs must be cold, honey. Let me cook you a fresh plate. You got to keep up your strength, boy. You getting puny from all that writing." And now Harold too can't keep himself from smiling and he sits down again and eats.

Well, it's very much on my mind, this little scene. I go down to the place, I'm there an hour, comes in this call from my sister Bessie. She's worried about Harold. "What's going to be with him?" she says. "Sitting around the whole day, making himself crazy?"

"Who told you he's sitting around the whole day?" I say.

"I know, I know," she says. "You think you're fooling me? The very first day, I saw what was going on. I said to Sophie afterwards, 'Sophie, this is not the same boy, he's changed,' I said——"

"Bessie, please. You want to say something, say it. I'm busy."

"Never mind," she says. "You got nothing more important than this boy. Listen, Morris, I'm warning you. It's a very serious problem now with the boys coming back from the army. My neighbour, Mrs. Finkel, she's got a nephew who came back from Korea six months ago, he was hanging around also like this, so the other day his mother found in his closet twenty pocket-books he's stolen." Can you imagine this woman? She's making such an analogy with Harold?

"And you know what else?" she says. "Thermometers. Dozens."

"So what do you want from me, Bessie," I say. "Let him use them in the best of health."

"Always with the jokes," she says. "Some day you will laugh out of the other side of your face. You know what happened with this boy? His father, when he found out about the pocket-books, he tried to talk to the boy, reasonable, he should bring the stuff back and the boy starts to holler, like an Indian, the father shouldn't pry into his private life. So he runs out of the house, this was a week ago, they haven't heard from him yet, the parents are going frantic."

"All right, Bessie," I say. "It's a very sad story. But do me a favour, save your stories for somebody else."

Well, it's a ridiculous thing. All the same, I can't help thinking. Comes into my mind, the way Harold is always grabbing the mail, the look on his face when he opened the letter this morning. What could it

be? He's getting mixed up with gangsters? The whole thing is nonsense. But the same time, I got this funny feeling in my stomach.

I get home in the evening, Harold has gone out. I see Sophie is fussing with some socks. "So what are you doing there?" I say.

"Mending Harold's socks," she says. "Some things are still the same. He still wears holes in the same places." She gives me a smile, it's like she would paste it on for Hallowe'en. I'm telling you, such a houseful of smiles, a person could get very nervous about his family.

She gets up now to put away the socks in his room, and I follow her in there. Well, I don't have to describe you. The accumulation, pennants, record player, records, books, the typewriter, papers lying all around—well, a boy's room. A whole lifetime of memories packed away.

She puts the socks away in the drawer and sees now a pair of shoes on the floor. She picks them up and takes them to the cupboard. Meanwhile I notice on the dressing-table a letter, with a snapshot sticking out, I'm curious and, automatic, I pick it up to look at the picture. It's a little Korean baby, a boy, with big dark eyes in a round face. I see the name is printed on the picture: Kim Sung. So all of a sudden an idea comes into my mind. I pull out the letter, I know it's not right but I can't help myself, and I start to read a few words: *The welcome clothes and toys arrived. You should see your little boy playing with the mechanical duck, it would gladden your heart. We know how happy you must be to be back with your American family. But your Korean family misses you. Please don't forget us.*

My head is turning round inside like a pinwheel. I feel like a spy altogether but now I understand everything, the way he is grabbing his letters, the secrecy, everything. His Korean family. And my Korean family too, God help me. I got a grandson, it's not enough his name should be Seidman, it's got to be Kim Sung Seidman.

The phone is ringing, and Sophie goes downstairs to answer it. I put back the letter, I cover it over with an ash-tray, Sophie shouldn't see it. Then I take off the ash-tray because I'm afraid Harold will notice. Then I can't make up my mind altogether. I feel as if I aged a hundred years in the last few minutes. How many times I thought how it would be—the feeling you're a grandfather. And before this, when Harold would come to me and say, "Pop, I'm in love, I want to get married." To a fine Jewish girl, from people with the same background and religion,

we should have at least a mutual meeting ground. Not to come into a house where they got maybe a Buddha in the hall, and an interpreter should have to say for you how-do-you-do to your in-laws.

I decide I got to go out, take some air, try to calm down a little. When I get home, Harold is in the kitchen with Sophie, she made him a couple sandwiches and he's eating them with a glass of milk. Isn't it funny, you see a boy drinking a glass of milk, you couldn't imagine such a boy could ever get into any real trouble?

"Hello, Pop," he says to me, very nicely. "How about a sandwich?"

"No thank you," I say. "I got no appetite." I'm wondering how *he* can sit and eat so fine. So I see Sophie is looking at me a little funny, she says, "Have something, Morris. You didn't eat all night," but I don't answer, I go out of the kitchen and I go upstairs, quick I go into Harold's room again, I look for the letter, it's gone. He's hidden it.

FOUR

WELL, the next day, you can believe me, I'm walking round in the shop, my mind is in a turmoil. Should I talk to Harold? Is it right for me to interfere? And Sophie should know? This is paralysing me altogether.

That evening, after dinner, Sophie goes out, she's got some kind of a meeting, Jenny goes to her room to do homework, I go into the living-room, I'm sitting there with the paper. After a while Harold comes in, he's walking up and down, I see he wants to talk and would you believe it, now I'm scared he should begin?

Finally he says, "Anything wrong, Pop?"

"Wrong? What should be wrong?" Sure. What should be wrong? We are living all together, happy, singing, like birds in a tree.

"You were so quiet at the table tonight," he says, "I thought maybe you're worried about business."

I put down the paper. "You want to know?" I say. "I'm worried about you, Harold. I've been worried about you ever since you came home. If you got some kind of problem, I want you to know, whatever it is, I'm still your father, I want to help you."

So he puts out a hand on my arm. "You're the best there is, Pop. I

didn't realize I was giving you so much occasion to worry about me."

"How much occasion does a parent need?" I say. "All the time in your room, writing, reading. And the letters you are getting, they are making your face look like a funeral parlour."

So he gives now a smile, like his lips are chapped, and he says, "You may as well know, Pop. They're rejection slips. From magazines, publishers. I've written some stories."

"Stories?" I say. "So why are you making such a secret, like you were putting together bombs in your room?"

"Well, I was hoping I could get one or two of them accepted, published, before I said anything about it."

"How many stories you got?" I ask him. "Enough for a book?"

"I imagine," he says.

"So I'll tell you what we're going to do. We'll publish from the stories a book. What do we need? A printer I've got——"

"No, Pop," he says. "That's not the way I want to do it. I want them to be brought out in the regular way——"

"So you'll wait maybe a year, five years for a regular publisher to make up their mind if you're good enough? Look, Harold, a book is a book. Printing is printing. You're a writer, you need a publisher, you got one. M. Seidman, 267 Seventh Avenue. I got thousands of customers all over the country. Believe me, they'll buy your books or they don't get from me another dress."

So he laughs, and he says, "No, Pop, that's just what I don't want. Either the stuff's good enough to be published or it isn't. I've got to find out the hard way. Besides," he says, "you might not even like the stuff."

"Listen, Harold. For me, it's always a wonderful thing, a person puts words on paper and they make people laugh, cry, or only to think, understand things a little better. And my own son should be an author? A book? And I can help him to publish it? Why should you deny me this pleasure, Harold?"

"You make it tough, Pop," he says, and I see his face is pale. "Okay. I hope you won't be sorry."

Well, now I got this settled, I decide I can wait with the other problems till later. And me, I got in the place plenty to occupy my mind. I'm getting out the invitations to my Spring Style Show, already the bills for it are coming in, in advance. Only one thing I haven't got yet—styles.

My designer, Miss Youssef, is brooding. The models we bought in Paris don't inspire her any more. It's always like this when I got to get out a new line. Everything is going wrong. I'm supposed to get some embroidered material from India, you know they're making there these beautiful saris, I'm putting it in the line this season, so the material doesn't come, week after week, I'm cabling, calling, nothing. In Italy, the autumn before this, I ordered tie silk, so it comes in finally but in the wrong widths. So I'm trying on the telephone, long-distance to Milan, and in the middle they are calling me into the shop.

There is the designer, Miss Youssef—yes, it's an odd name. I don't know what nationality, maybe Russian, Yugoslav, maybe a new nationality altogether, from Mars. Actually she is a very high-type woman, talented, and attractive too. But such temperament. When she is angry, she is angry all over, her knees, her elbows, her hair, sparks are coming from her. With her now is Larry Kogen, and in between they got Marie, she's got on one of the new styles, it's not finished, you know, only pinned, and mostly in the bust.

"Will you look at this, Morris?" Larry says. "Where am I supposed to sell this dress? Ancient Egypt? Look at it. What do we call it? The Square Look? If God intended a woman's chest to look like that, He would have built them that way."

"You and God," I say. "Since when did you become with Him so confidential?"

Meantime Miss Youssef is looking at him, she's holding in her hand a scissors, I'm afraid she'll stab him with it.

"Mister Seidman," she says. "I am not going to have an itinerant peddler with stones in his head passing judgment on my work. You can make up your mind now, either he goes or I go."

So I say, "Miss Youssef, he's not going and you're not going. You got with me a contract, and if you break it I'll throw you in jail. I'm sick and tired your tantrums. When you got the style finished, I'll look at it. If I like it, okay. And if not, I'll throw it out. And you, Larry, get back in the showroom and stay there. When the line comes out you'll sell it. And if you can't sell it, you'll go somewhere else where they make better styles. And you, Marie," I say to the model, "get me an aspirin. It's ten thirty in the morning and already my head is busting."

So she gives me a smile, and she makes with her hand on the lips,



you know, like blowing a kiss, this is already as good as an aspirin, such a beautiful girl, a doll.

So in the middle of everything, comes a call now from the printer. "Seidman," he says, "I got here your son with a bundle manuscript." It's like he was, I don't know, a doctor and he's saying, "I got here your son with a bad case of typhoid."

"So I got here a designer with hysterics. What's the problem?"

"This is a serious proposition?" he asks me. "You going to pay for this whole book? It weighs maybe two pounds."

"You're a critic from books now, Mr. Ferentzy? How much should a good book weigh?" I ask him. "A pound and three quarters?"

"Don't get insulted," he says. "I only want to know the score. It's going to cost plenty. How many copies you want?"

"Figure for five thousand," I tell him. "And do a good job. Like the boy wants. He's there? Put him on."

In a minute I hear Harold say, "Hello, Pop." His voice is shaking a little. "Pop," he says, "are you sure you want to do this? Maybe you ought to think it over. Maybe the stories are no good."

"You wrote them," I say. "I know they're good. Let me have a little pleasure in my life."

"You're a wonder, Pop. You deserve a book all to yourself."

So I'm embarrassed and at this point I see Marie come in with the aspirin and a glass of water. "Wait a minute, Harold," I say. "I'm having here a Seventh Avenue cocktail." I take from Marie the aspirin, I say into the phone, "There's a beautiful girl here with me—Marie Anderson."

"Oh," he says. "Let me talk to her."

So I give her the phone and I hear now a conversation. "Of course," she says. "Oh yes, a likely story. . . . Have you tried long walks and a hot Martini at bedtime? . . . Well, naturally. . . . I'd love to some time. . . . Must I answer that?" Finally she says, "Well, natch . . . one o'clock, then," and she hands me back the phone, she's pink like a carnation, I know, it's not stylish nowadays with the modern girls, blushing, but to me this is so appealing, I can't tell you. I say on the phone to Harold, "You want to come for lunch with me?"

"Thanks, Pop, but I just made a date. I'm taking Marie to lunch."

"Good, good, fine," I say. "You should both eat in the best of health."

And all of a sudden I'm getting a little sick in the stomach, I'm thinking about the girl in Korea, sitting in a garden, waiting. And the little boy with the big, sad eyes. Forgotten. It's like a stone in my heart.

Well, the next few weeks I'm busy in the place, morning till night, getting ready the line. One night I come home, I find Harold all excited, he's got the galley proofs from his book, it's called *Stars in the Purple Dusk*, two copies, one for him, one for me. Well, Sophie's not home, she's attending a lecture, Harold didn't say anything to her about the book, me neither, I think let it be a big surprise for her. Surprise. Me, I'm lucky I didn't get from the whole business a heart attack.

I don't know why, all along I had an idea this would be a certain kind of book, a love story, sad-sweet, about an American boy and a Korean girl, you know, a modern-type Madame Butterfly. So now I'm settling myself down to read. I start in with the first story, it's about a soldier, he's helping with the wounded, in a hospital, and he finds out a colonel doctor is stealing from the supplies narcotics because he is a dope fiend. Why is he a dope fiend? Because he can't stand the suffering he sees all around. So the boy says to the doctor, "Why don't you try better to fight the system that is making all the misery in the world, instead of stealing morphine and shooting it in your arm you should forget the whole thing?" So what's the answer? The doctor makes up a case against the boy, that *he* is stealing the morphine, and the boy goes away to jail for seven years. Well, it's not a very cheerful story. But life sometimes ain't so cheerful. So I'm reading number two, three, four, always the same, a young man, full of ideals, he bumps his head against the system, the big corporations, the lawyers, the employers, and he goes either to jail, or he is starving, or he is killed entirely. So finally, I know I got to face Harold sooner or later, and it's heavy in my heart. He's expecting from me a hooray, compliments, and I got to throw on him a pail of cold water. I go to his room.

"Well, Harold," I say, "I'm not a critic but I think you are writing very fine, sometimes the descriptions are very strong, the people are talking like people, only one thing I don't know. To whom are we going to send the books? Seems to me like you didn't leave out anybody. In the North the industrialists are robbers, in the South the textile manufacturers are vampires, in the West the citrus growers are gangsters, in the East the whole government are crooks, the unions they're corrupt,

the workers got no courage, the teachers are scared. So who's left? The hero and he always ends up in jail, or dead. Tell me, the system he is always knocking his head against, what is it? Capitalism?"

"It's got a lot of names," he says. "Greed, indifference, whatever it is that keeps people from being decent and kind."

"Tell the truth, Harold," I say. "The young man in your stories, he believes in Communism, no?"

"Call it what you want," he says. "He believes in the dignity of the individual, in a fair shake for everybody."

"I'm sorry, Harold," I say. "People who read this book are going to call you a Red."

"So let them. Names don't scare me."

"But tell me, why are you so much against the system? Your father did pretty good with the system. You got a good home from it, an education. Where can you find a better system?"

"Right here," he says, excited. "We can make this system work for everybody, not just you and me and a few fortunate others. Just because you did all right doesn't mean we can sit around now and say everything's fine. It isn't."

"Sit around?" I say. "Einstein sat around? Eisenhower is sitting around? General Motors sits around? Your father sits around? You're talking like a child."

"I'm sorry, Pop," he says. "We're not talking about the same thing. You just don't know what's going on in the world. Millions of people, hungry, hopeless, I've seen them. Koreans. Indo-Chinese. Japanese. Do you know what's going on, while you go down to your office every day and manufacture dresses? For a profit?"

"Ah ha," I say. "Profit. That's the dirty word, hah? So if I went bankrupt, in Indo-China there would be a celebration? Firecrackers, hooray. Seidman is broke, we can eat."

Well, one word and another. Finally I say, "It's no use, Harold. I got my business to protect. And I got you to protect. This book you're not going to publish. Not with my money."

So he throws down the whole thing on the floor and he jumps up. "All right," he hollers. "I knew this would happen. Why did you get me started? Build up my hopes? I didn't want you to do it in the first place. I knew you'd be afraid."

We're so busy hollering, we don't hear Sophie come in. "What's going on?" she says. "Who's making a revolution?"

"I'll tell you," I say. "Your son wants I should throw away my business because in Indo-China there's people who are hungry."

"Oh, for Pete's sake," Harold yells. "There's no use talking to you. You twist everything I say. Well, you can go on living in your plush-lined vacuum—your ivory tower with central heating. But not me."

And before I know what he's doing, he runs out of the house. Sophie is standing there, we're looking at each other, I don't know what to say, it's like somebody just hit me on the head with a hammer. So then Sophie starts to cry. "Why are you carrying on?" I say. "He went out for a walk, he'll cool off, he'll come back." But I'm sick in the stomach, I'm telling you. I like scenes but they should be on the stage, in the movies, opera, with singing. Not in my own house, with my own boy, and my wife should stand crying. "Stop the tap," I said to her. "He'll be back." But ten times during the night I'm getting up to look out of the window. And he don't come back.

Next morning, first thing, he calls up Sophie. She comes back to the table, her face is white. "Where is he, Ma?" Jenny says. "Did he elope?"

Gladys is standing by the buffet, her face is white too. Nearly.

"He's in a hotel," Sophie says, "he wouldn't tell me where. He's not coming home. He says I shouldn't worry. He's got a job. In an all-night garage." She looks now like she's going to cry again, "He wants to know, can he come some time and get his things."

"What do you mean, can he come?" I say. "What are you asking? Who's going to stop him?"

"Do I know what's going on round here?" she says. "I go out for five minutes to a lecture, you say something to my boy and he is out of the house, in some horrible hotel."

"How do you know it's horrible?" I say. "Could maybe be a very nice hotel." But I see she's not looking at me. I look at Jenny, she's also got something on her plate she is studying, like homework. I look at Gladys, she turns away, she can't stand the sight of me neither. So I throw down my napkin. "All right," I say, "the monster. Simon Legree. Ivan the Terrible. Tell him I'm not going to be in the house all day, or tonight either. He can come and move out whatever he wants."

So now Sophie looks at me. "What's tonight?" she says. "You're

going to a hotel too? Maybe I should call in an estate agent, sell the house, nobody's going to need it any more?"

"I'm going to be in the shop," I say. "Attending to my business, for a change. So your son don't have to worry I'll shoot him with a shot-gun if he comes to get his clothes."

"Some house," Jenny says. "Harold comes back after three years in the army, living in swamps, and now he's got to stay in a crummy hotel."

"Listen, young lady," I say, "maybe you would like to pack your clothes too and join him in the hotel?"

"Leave her alone," Sophie says. "You've done enough already. Go. Go to your business."

Well? You think I had enough already that morning? I get down to the place I get right away a call from my sister Bessie, in Flushing. "I just talked to Sophie," she says. "So Harold is in a Bowery flophouse, he could get a disease altogether. What's the matter with you, Morris?"

"For heaven's sake," I yell, "we have a discussion, what can I do if he runs out of the house like a wild Indian?"

"A discussion," she says. "I know your discussions. A person could get from them an apoplexy."

"Bessie," I say, "do me a favour, call up the rest of the family, the cousins too, and tell them I got leprosy, nobody should come near me until further notice from the health department. Okay?"

That afternoon Sophie calls me up. "He's really going," she tells me. "He's in his room, packing. I never saw him like this. So stubborn."

"Ask him if he'll talk to me on the phone."

In a minute he comes on the phone. "Hello, Dad," he says.

Dad! "From last night to now I turned into a Dad?" I say. "Pop isn't good enough any more?" He doesn't answer me. "Harold," I say, "last night was last night. Today is today. I want you should wait home for me, we'll have a talk."

"There's no point in it," he says. "It wouldn't change anything. I've decided it's better for me to be by myself."

So I see it's no use. "All right, Harold," I say, "do whatever you want. Be independent. Leave at least your address, we can send you a postcard, you'll maybe want to hear if your sister is getting married, or Samson needs maybe some shots from the vet. And now, if you'll please put back your mother on the phone." In a minute I hear Sophie's voice

again, it's coming up like from a cellar. "I can't stand it," she says. "Leaving home for what, to go live in a hotel, with bed-bugs."

"How do you know there's bed-bugs, for heaven's sake? You been there?" I don't want to but I'm hollering. It's so foolish. Bed-bugs.

Well, I don't need to tell you, that night Sophie is feeling awful, and she gets me so nervous, I am thinking maybe she is right, it's my fault, the whole thing. When I get to the place next morning I find there a message from my sister Bessie, I should call her. So when I call her back, first thing she says, "I heard about Harold. I feel terrible. I had a feeling over the house the other night. Something about him. I said to Sophie, Sophie, I said——"

"Bessie," I say, "I would like to discuss the whole thing with you, I'm sure you got a lot of valuable ideas, and you wouldn't keep a single one of them a secret from me, but I got lots of things to do."

"You got nothing more important to do than your son's welfare," she says. "You know he is working in a garage in Twenty-third Street? Myron stopped there this morning, it's near his office, he just called me. You know what Harold was doing? Washing cars."

"So what would he do in a garage? Paint pictures? Listen, Bessie, don't get so excited. I got this on my mind, I assure you."

So I hang up and I try to think, what should I do. If I go down to this garage, try to have a talk with him, it will only make him embarrassed and I'm liable to get mad altogether and then he'll get stubborn and what will I accomplish? Finally, I call in Marie to my office. "Can I have a talk with you, personal? Man to man? About Harold."

"Certainly, Mr. Seidman," she says.

"His mother has an idea the reason for his behaviour is a revolt against the father and it comes because his emotions are bottled up, he don't know enough about girls, he's too shy. It's maybe a funny question. But I'm asking. What do you think?"

She's smiling, but serious too. "Well, you can tell Mrs. Seidman to stop worrying. I had dinner with Harold last night, and he's not one bit shy." Her face is getting pink but she's looking me straight in the eyes. "I mean, he's very sweet and idealistic, but—well——"

"I know what you mean," I say. "All right, this is one question. Number two. You think this working in a garage is what he wants? You don't think it's just for spite?"

"I'd be surprised if Harold did anything for spite."

I say, "All right, he wants to be a worker, with his hands? Well, I got here a factory, with jobs. So the boss is not a stranger, it's his father. But he can have here the same independence. At least he'll be learning a business from which he could some time make a decent living. I'll ask you a favour, Marie. The next time you see him, ask him to come up at least and have a talk with me."

"Man to man," she says, and she comes over, bends down quick, gives me a kiss on the cheek and runs out.

FIVE

ELL, naturally, I don't expect anything will happen, anyway not so quick, but next morning who's there waiting in my office? Harold. My heart gives such a jump in my chest, you wouldn't believe it. "Hello, Dad," he says.

I could see he's not feeling friendly. Very strict. "Hello, Harold," I say. "What brings you to Seventh Avenue?"

"I thought maybe you might tell me," he says. "Mom suggested yesterday that I should come down and talk with you. And I got the same suggestion from Uncle Myron in the morning and from Aunt Bessie, twice, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. And Marie last night at dinner. I haven't heard from the mayor yet but everyone else in town says I ought to talk to you." So, he's making with the sarcasm. I'm going to have here a contest. "First of all," I say, "you're not going to hear from the mayor because he is off my pay-roll this season. The second thing, your mother, Aunt Bessie, Uncle Myron, said you should talk to me, this is their idea, not mine. Marie, this is something different. I had with her a talk yesterday. I like to talk to this girl. When a homely girl has got some sense, this is already a tonic. But when a beautiful girl's got also brains, this is an inspiration. Do you agree?"

"I agree," he says. "So?"

"So. It's encouraging we should agree on something."

"She also mentioned the idea of my working here."

"Well," I say, "I got a factory with a couple hundred employees. Why couldn't you find something to do here?"

"First, I don't want to put anybody out of a job, to make room for me. Second, I don't know anything about the dress business."

"You could learn, and you're not going to put anybody out of a job. I'm not going to fire anybody. I need somebody to look after my interests. I can't be everywhere at once."

"But I don't know the first thing about it," he says.

"You got brains. That's all you need. The rest you can learn. You'll work for a while in the shipping department, in the piece goods, learn the whole operation."

"Aren't you afraid I'll infect your other employees with my ideas?" he says. "Ideas are contagious, you know."

"You think they've been waiting just for you for the revolution? If they haven't been infected until now, you wouldn't infect them. I'll tell you something else. You think you can run my business better than me, for the employees, for everybody, I'm willing you should do it. Only you got to show me you know what you're doing."

He looks at me a minute, then he says, "Well, it's a fair proposition. If I can stay at the hotel, keep my independence. I'll think about it."

"Fine," I say. "You stay where you want. And think about it. And I'll expect you when? Tomorrow morning? Wednesday?"

He gives me now a smile. "Proposition X," he says. "Vote yes or yes." He goes to the door and he stands there for a minute, then he turns round and he's got on his face a big smile now. "I just voted," he says. "I'll be in tomorrow morning."

Well, you wouldn't believe it maybe but I'm feeling weak in the knees, like I just nearly had an accident with the car. It's a funny thing, the whole time with Harold, everything has got always this kind of mixed-up emotion in it, I'm only worried about the boy, his happiness, his future—and the same time it's always like it would be some kind of a contest between us, who's going to win. Can you explain this?

WELL, now Sophie is a little happier, and next day I start to show Harold the book-keeping system, the inventory, piece goods. I have him work with Larry, make the acquaintance of the customers. I see that he picks up things very quick, it's really a pleasure, you know, the mind of an intelligent boy. I hear nice remarks from the customers in the show-room, the people in the shop, they like him.

But a few days later, my senior presser comes into the office, Simon Karp, he's been with me a good many years. He complains Harold keeps bothering him with speeches, he should own these machines he works on, he should have a voice in management, he should remember the dignity of the individual.

"So I'm getting sick and tired already," Simon says, "and I say to him 'Listen, Mr. Junior, I'm nearly sixty years old, I got three grown children, married, I got five grandchildren, I got a property in Long Island, I got along all these years without dignity of the individual, I'll get along the rest of my life without it too.' A voice in the operation of the business, he tells me. This I need like a hole in the head. 'Let your father,' I say to him, 'have the voice, and the headaches. Who needs it? Who wants it?'"

After that, comes another thing. I send Harold out with Larry on the road, to see how does he take to it, the selling. On this trip they see Mr. Pankhurst, a very fine gentleman in Baton Rouge, he owns there a big department store. The end of the week, they come back, they got some very nice orders, and Larry says to me, "Morris, the kid's got the makings of a great salesman. Great personality. But I wish he'd learn to keep his nose out of the customer's business. I had quite a thing with him and Pankhurst. Harold kept telling him about minorities and Negroes and segregation, that racial differences are a fraud kept alive only by the big-money people in the South. What's with him anyway? He can queer a lot of business for us with that Commie routine."

"All right," I say. "He's got to learn. It'll take a little time. We got to be patient."

Patient. It's not even a week later, comes for me the last straw with Harold. Marie comes into my office and I see from the expression on her face something is not kosher. No smile, nothing, she sees on the desk a bottle of aspirin and she says, "Could I have one of these, Mr. Seidman?"

"You?" I say. "You joined the club?" And she gives me now the kind of smile you are giving maybe to a doctor, he's just going to operate on you. She swallows down an aspirin and then she says, "I guess I better just give you this," and she hands me a paper. "It's a petition of grievances from the models. You'd better read it, Mr. Seidman." So I read it, I can't believe my eyes:

We, the undersigned, wish to present the following points for consideration by the management:

1. No model is obliged to submit to unseemly advances by the customers, indecent jokes, propositions, etc.

2. No model shall be expected to work longer than two hours without a fifteen-minute coffee break.

3. Some place in the factory, apart from the dressing-rooms, should be set aside as a recreation-room for models, with a small library, record player, a supply of classical records, etc.

4. No model shall be expected to go out with any buyer whose cultural or political views are repugnant to her.

I look at the bottom, I see this is signed by all the models, Doreen, Agnes, Shelley, Arlene, Marie, and I say, "Marie, this is a beautiful piece of work, it's maybe a historical document, I want you should go out and buy a frame for it. Afterwards you'll call me up and I'll tell you what to do with it."

"I don't know what you mean," she says.

"What I mean," I say, "is your boss has got political ideas that are repugnant to you and you are fired. And the rest of the girls too. You tell them they should take this petition down to City Hall, or the union, maybe they will play games with you. I'm not in the mood. I'm running a business here. Not a kindergarten."

So she starts in to cry now. "If you want to know," she says, "I'm sorry about this whole thing. It was Doreen's idea. But Harold helped her write it up and he thought I should be the one to present it."

"So Harold is the boss round here now?" I say. "You got to do what Harold thinks? You haven't got a mind of your own?"

"I told him I didn't want to hurt your feelings," she says and she's crying louder. "But he said it's a matter of principle and I love him and what can I do?"

Well, I look at her, this fine lovely girl all broken up and all of a sudden I got enough. I switch on the buzzer and I send for Harold. In a minute he comes in, he sees Marie sitting on the chair, she's wiping her eyes with a handkerchief and her face is white. He looks at me, I'm walking up and down, I feel as if I'm going to explode. "What is it, Dad?" he says, real strict, like it was me made Marie cry.

I say, "This is your idea, this petition?"

"Well, it came out in discussion with the girls."

"Who asked you to discuss with the girls? Did I hire you to have discussions with the girls?"

"I thought we had an understanding about that," he says, very stiff. "I made it clear——"

"Shut up," I say, so loud I'm scaring even myself. "You and your cockeyed ideas. You didn't have nerve enough to bring it in yourself, this stupid paper, you got to send this girl to do your dirty work for you. Next thing you'll be sending in the shipping clerks with an ultimatum I should get a Turkish bath for the men's room maybe so they can spend there four hours a day, smoking, instead of only two. And another thing. Rosenzweig, Karp and Larry, my whole organization, they're sick and tired of your discussions and your cockamaney ideas. It's time you grew up and remembered you got some responsibilities too. Not just to shoot off your mouth."

"You mean I should put on a muzzle——"

"Muzzle shmuzzle," I say. "You want to work here, behave yourself. Otherwise you could go back to your all-night garage and lecture there to the Cadillacs."

So now Karp opens the door, he's holding a dress, he's got a long face, down to here. "Can I see you a minute?" he says.

"You can see me more than a minute," I say. And to Harold I say, "Okay. I said what I got to say. Make up your mind."

"I don't have to," he says. "You just made it up for me." And he goes out of the office, Marie with him, and I don't have to tell you how I'm feeling in the stomach. "So what is it, Simon?" I say.

"I burnt a dress," he says, like he would be telling me he burnt Brooklyn Bridge. "Number 720. It's a sample."

"Number 720." I can't help myself, I'm starting to raise my voice. So much aggravation already in one morning. "It's supposed to be at the embroiderer's this afternoon. How could such a thing happen?"

So he says, "I would like to tell you how it happened. But I know how you are with your family."

"You got more complaints against my son?" I holler. "What did he do now? He held your hand down on the iron?"

"Don't shout," he says. "Please."

"So twenty years Rosenzweig's been shouting at you, it's all right," I say. "Me, the boss, I can't raise my voice."

"Rosenzweig, I don't care," he says. "He hollers. This is his nature. I've been with you more than twenty years, you never shouted at me before, you never told me you were the boss——"

"So maybe it's time you should learn," I say. "I'm your employer and I want from you a little respect. Plain talk."

"Plain talk," he says. "Respect. When we were together in the shop on Bleecker Street, you didn't have money to pay your bills, you needed somebody to stay till two, three in the morning, to catch three hours' sleep on the cutting table and again in the morning, first thing, on the pressing machine—then you didn't want from me respect. Eight months during the depression I didn't draw from you a cent salary, I lent you yet money for lunch, you didn't want from me respect. Now you want from me respect. All right. Ring there that fancy buzzer and tell the accounting department. You owe me for one week's wages. Take off for the dress I burnt. And don't cheat yourself."

And now his voice breaks altogether, he runs out of the office and I realize what I did to this man, loyal, fine, a real gentleman, believe me, an old friend besides. I get sick in my stomach when I realize how I was talking to him, like out of my mind. So I run after him into the shop, he's standing by a rack of dresses, crying. "Simon," I say, "listen to me. I'm sorry the way I talked to you. I got things on my mind now—you know what I mean. Please, Simon."

But he turns away from me, he's sobbing, it's a terrible thing to see a man like this, you know he's ashamed, besides everything else. "Simon," I beg him, "you think I care you burnt a dress? You could burn fifty. Come back to my office. I'll send down, we'll have a cup of coffee."

So he says now, I can hardly hear him, "Not now. Just let me alone. Please. I'm ashamed. I'll go away in a minute."

"Simon," I say. "Please. Don't go away. Don't make me feel like a criminal." So he wipes his face now with his sleeve, he looks at me a second, then he takes a dress from the rack. "You're going back to the machine?" I say.

"Where else should I go?" he says. "To play tennis maybe? Sit in the park the whole day, play pinochle with Coxey's Army?"

"All right, Simon," I say. "I'll talk to you later. Maybe tonight we'll go out, the three of us, Rosenzweig too, hah?"

So he gives me now a little smile and I'm feeling so relieved, I couldn't

tell you. I go back to my office, Harold is there with Marie. He looks pale but I'll tell you the truth, for once in my life, I don't care. I'm sick and disgusted with him. "What is it?" he says. "What's wrong with Mr. Karp? Is there anything I can do?"

"Do? You still want to do something? You are a magician. Twenty-odd years I know this man, never a word between us. You're here three weeks and I just nearly broke his heart, that's all." I see now he's got his hat and coat on. "Listen," I say, "you're dressed already to go? Go. Before I really give you what's in my heart."

"Look," Harold says, "I can't stand it that Rosenzweig yells at Karp as if he were dirt. I only talked to him about his self-respect——"

"Self-respect," I say. "Why don't you worry about your own self-respect. If people would only know the whole story——" All of a sudden I got to let go. "Look at you," I say. "Putting on such an innocent face. Everything I could stand. But that you lie, you're a hypocrite to this girl, she thinks you're a holy wonder—this I can't stand. You told her maybe about Korea, you were there with your big heart, spreading the brotherhood of man?" And I see he's giving me now a very fishy look, so I say, "All right, I saw the picture, with the letter. I went into your room and spied on you. Sue me. I didn't say a word, not to you, not to your mother. I was waiting to see, maybe you got a little spark of decency left inside you, you'll do something about it yourself. But no, you got speeches to make. The whole world to reform. Only not yourself."

"Seems to me," he says, "you're making a pretty big speech yourself. If you've finished, I'd like to go."

"I've not finished," I say, "and you'll kindly wait until I have. Before you are getting this girl involved with you any deeper, you are going to tell her about the whole business in Korea, everything. Afterwards, she can make up her own mind."

"I'll leave that to you," he says. "You seem to have it all worked out, so you tell her." To Marie he says, "I'll call you later." And he goes out.

Well, Marie's watching me, what am I going to say now, and I can't even look her straight in the eyes.

"Marie," I say, "I suppose with you too I'm now a monster."

"Of course not," she says. "It's just that Harold—well, he's almost too noble for this world, Mr. Seidman."

Yeah, noble. "Marie, he talked to you sometimes about Korea?"

"Yes. It's done things to him. He's so filled with all the troubles of the world. For instance, that tenement where he lives——"

"He's living in a tenement?" I say. This is news to me.

"Yes, he moved from the hotel."

Fine thing. I worked, struggled, to get my family out of a tenement. Now my son is back in. "Well, there's a family there," she says. "The Sowolskis, there's eight of them living in one tiny apartment, five children and three adults—you know what Harold's been doing?"

"Better don't tell me," I say.

"No, seriously. He's terribly upset about it. He's been after the landlord—he's called up the Health Department——"

"So what will he accomplish?" I say. "The landlord will get mad, he'll take it out on the tenants. Listen, Marie, I got something to tell you. How noble Harold is. It's going to hurt you, but you got to know what is the situation with him." I pull in my breath and start. "Marie, Harold is a father." She opens wide her big blue eyes and I turn away, I don't want to see them with tears. "Yes," I say, "he's got a little boy in Korea. I saw the picture. I'm sorry, Marie. But you got to know."

"Are you talking about Kim Sung?" she says.

I look at her now, I can't believe I heard right. "You mean," I say, "you know already? Harold told you?"

"Of course," she says. "Why not?"

"I see." Like a blind man, I see. This is for me too modern already. "Well," I say, "I'm glad you can be calm. I suppose we got to make allowances. A young man, alone, in a foreign country——"

"Mr. Seidman," she says, "I can't understand why this upsets you so much. Is it because it's a Korean child?"

"It doesn't bother you," I say, "Harold's got a Madame Butterfly in Korea?" She starts to laugh. "This is a joke?" I ask her.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I was just trying to visualize Mrs. Wethering as Madame Butterfly."

"Who's Mrs. Wethering?"

"She's an Englishwoman about sixty years old," Marie says. "She runs this home in Seoul for orphaned Korean children."

"An orphanage?" I say. It's getting dark in front of my eyes.

"Yes—didn't Harold tell you?"

"I'll tell you the truth," I say, "I didn't ask him."

"Well, he wouldn't volunteer it," she says. "He's like that, always embarrassed about the good things he does. I think that's why I fell in love with him, more than anything else." She gives me now a smile and I try hard to smile back. "I'm afraid you've jumped to some wild conclusions, Mr. Seidman," she says. "Harold visited Mrs. Wethering's orphanage and then got some of the boys in his company to adopt a number of the children, sort of a foster-parent arrangement. Harold's been acting as a kind of secretary for the group, and he adopted Kim Sung himself. He's going to see that he's taken care of until he gets through school. And I'm going to help him."

She gets up now. "I'm sorry about the petition," she says. "It's silly—you've always been more than fair with us." And she starts to go out.

"Marie," I say, "you'll tell Harold I'm sorry? About the Madame Butterfly business?"

"I'll tell him," she says.

"But not about the petition," I say. "I got principles too."

"I understand," she says. "Good-bye, Mr. Seidman."

"Good-bye." Good-bye, Marie. And good-bye, Harold, too.

SIX

O WHAT are you going to do in a situation like this? Only one thing. You could get drunk. I got a couple bottles in the place,

I keep them for the customers, so I open up one and I take a drink, feels kind of funny, I'm not a drinking man, you know. But I put it down like medicine and, naturally, it don't make me feel better, only worse. How could I build up such a fantasy against my own son? I could have settled the whole thing with a simple question. Maybe like my sister Bessie says, I'm getting soft in the head.

I can see in my mind the picture of that Korean boy, the little face with the big eyes, and I'm thinking: It's only yesterday, last week, Harold was a kid himself, so warm-hearted. I remember one time, he was maybe seven years old, a man comes to the door, he's selling matches and pins from a satchel and he faints there in the hall, and Harold gives him food from the fridge. For two weeks the man comes to our building every day, Harold brings him things to eat and drink. And then I find

out from my cousin, Max Ellenstein, who runs an insurance and escrow business in the neighbourhood, that the man only owns two apartment houses. I didn't tell Harold about it. I didn't want he should feel bad.

Now I'm thinking, maybe I should have told him. It's a wonderful thing in this world for a person to have a heart. But it's a good thing also to have a head with some sense in it. With all heart you can make as big a mish-mash from your life as with no heart at all. Then I realize. I'm only saying this to myself for an excuse. You know what is the hope of this world? Not old fools like me, they got everything worked out. No. It's young people like Harold, they only got a heart and a dream and they're not afraid to make fools of themselves for it. This is the hope of the world and God bless them for it, my Harold with the rest.

So I got to make this toast to Harold, sitting in my office, and I guess I made it too many times because I'm getting dizzy, and then I think about the Korean orphanage and those little brown kids with their big eyes, so much trouble already, and one thing and another, I start to cry and I'm getting disgusted with myself, so I leave the shop and I'm driving home finally. Sophie is waiting up for me, reading the paper, the face is with cold cream and she says to me, "Good morning."

"Good morning?" I say. "What happened to good evening?"

"Look at the time," she says.

I look but I'm not sure what's there on the clock. I bend over to kiss her, she pushes me away. "You smell like a brewery," she says.

"So?" I say. "You married me for better or for worse, no?"

"Who do you think you are," she says, "coming home at this hour, drunk? A Polish landlord? An Irish cop?"

"I'm a Jewish fool," I say. "An old Jewish fool. And I'm not drunk. Only a little intoxicated, a man is entitled once in a while."

"Something happened between you and Harold today, you get drunk?" she asks. "You lost your temper again, I suppose."

"It's a long story, Sophie," I say. "Have we got some brandy?"

"You don't need any more brandy. What are you celebrating, for heaven's sake? You got something to celebrate?"

"Maybe," I say. "Maybe I'm going to be a father-in-law. You were worried Harold doesn't pay enough attention to girls. He's paying attention. I think he's in love." I look at Sophie, she's folding the paper, unfolding it. "I don't notice you are jumping for joy."

"How can I jump for joy?" she says. "I haven't seen the girl."

"You're afraid? You're afraid maybe you'll like her."

"Don't be such a psychoanalyst," she says.

"I know how it is with you, Sophie," I say. "You want Harold should meet a girl and get married, in the worst way. It don't matter who the girl is, so long as she's from a good family, beautiful, intelligent, educated, rich, and you pick her out, and then it should happen tomorrow, not today." So I see she puts away the paper now and takes her handkerchief. "Sophie," I say, "you're going to turn on the tap now?"

"Well, what do you think?" she says. "Out of a blue sky, I hear my son is practically married. I'm glad you decided to take me into your confidence finally. Who is she? How did he meet her?"

"She works for me. In the place. Marie Anderson."

She slaps a hand on her head, it makes a sound like a pistol.

"You want some brandy now?" I ask her. "You'll join me?"

"A model!" she says. "And a Gentile!"

"She's a wonderful girl," I tell her. "A prize. You'll be proud to have her for a daughter-in-law."

"Over my dead body," she says.

Well, I don't want to make a long story, I didn't sleep too much that night, and the next morning I go to Ferentzy, the printer, I tell him he should run off a hundred copies of Harold's book, fix them up, with the bindings, covers, nice jackets, everything. At the office, I'm wondering now, should I call Marie at her home, find out from her Harold's address. I feel a little funny about it. Well, before I could make up my mind, yes or no, Marie is on the phone. "Mr. Seidman," she says, her voice is kind of shaky. "I'm down here at Harold's place. There's some trouble. Could you possibly come down? Maybe you could help."

So I don't ask her what kind of trouble, I get from her the address, in Christopher Street, I run out and get a taxi. Well, what should I tell you, when I get there? Some mish-mash. That poor family, you know, the Sowolskis, they got with them five kids and the old grandmother, and they're living all together in three rooms, the father can't make a living, he's some kind of a peddler, neckties or something, so naturally this is for Harold a federal case against the system, he made a big fuss with the landlord, like it would be his fault altogether, he demanded for them better living conditions, and the landlord told him to go you-

know-where, so Harold got in touch with the Health Department, they came and looked and it's true, the conditions were unhealthy and, like Harold wanted, they put pressure on the landlord. So what does he do? He sends over a dispossess, the Sowolskis should move and find themselves better conditions. And now they are out in the street, the whole family, with the furniture together.

It gives me a funny feeling, this scene. Like a bad dream from my youth. How many times I seen it, on the East Side. What family didn't live there always with this nightmare in the mind, they should be in the street, with the furniture? And in this day and age, the same thing should be going on. It's making me hot and cold.

There's a lot of people in the street, arguing, hollering, Harold and Marie in the middle and a woman, she looks like a caretaker, is standing, shaking her fist in Harold's face. "You had to stick your nose in," she hollers. "Make trouble. Buttinsky."

"Dirty stool pigeon," another woman says. She's got a breath like a distillery. "Dirty capitalist," and she spits on Harold. I'm asking you. Is this an irony, or not?

So I say, "Wait a minute, everybody please. Take it easy."

"Sure, take it easy," says the caretaker lady. "You and your flannel suit. These people got no place to sleep tonight."

"They'll have a place," I say. "Where is Mr. Sowolski?"

Somebody points him out to me, a poor *shnoook*, he don't know what hit him, he's standing by the furniture and children are hanging from him in bunches, like grapes. So I go over, I say, "Listen, here is some money. Take your family to a hotel tonight. Here is my card, you'll call me in the morning I'll see can I find you a place. And don't worry. I'll fix up with the caretaker she should look after your furniture till you are settled somewhere."

All right, I got this out of the way, but now there is a siren going, comes up a police wagon, two policemen get out. The landlord signed some kind of a complaint against Harold, he was interfering with the dispossess, he made an assault and battery on one of the movers—a likely story, you ever seen a New York mover?—but anyway, Harold has got to go to the police station. One of the policemen grabs him by the arm, he says, "Come on buddy, no arguments," and Harold makes a fist and punches him in the face. So what's the next instalment?



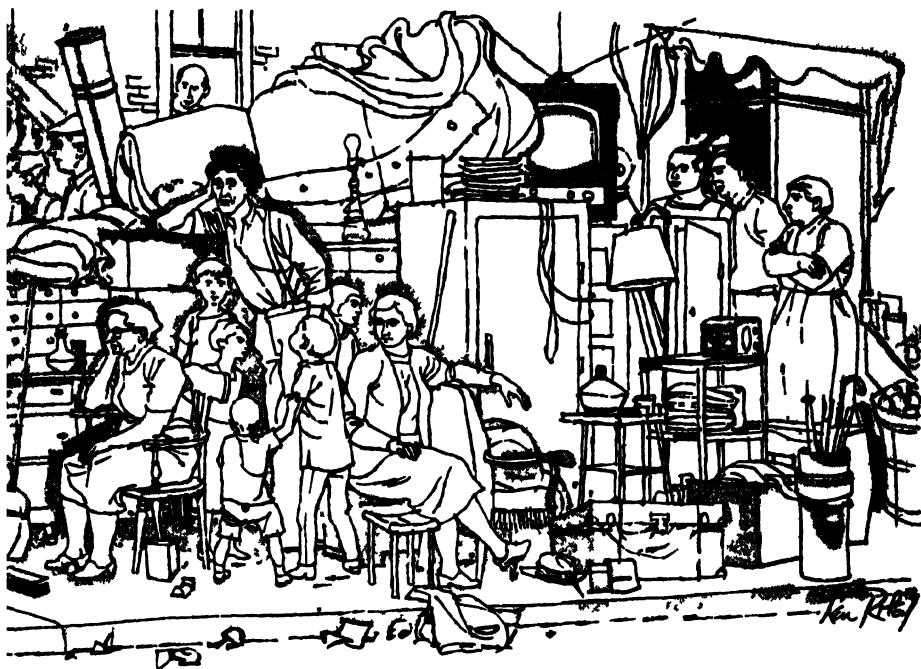
Naturally we are in a police station, waiting. I got my lawyer there, he tries everything, but the sergeant is mad, he don't like civilians should hit policemen. The upshot is, Harold's got to stay overnight in jail, he can talk to the judge in the morning. And Marie keeps saying, "But he only wanted to help. Don't they understand?" It's pitiful.

I say to her, Harold should hear also, "Marie, to help people, you got to *be* somebody. You got to have some influence, some position, and money don't hurt neither. Just from making speeches to landlords you couldn't accomplish anything. They got problems too, you know. Bills to pay. Mortgages——"

So Harold says, "I might have known you'd be for the landlord."

Well, what should I say to him? He's sitting there with his black eye, he looks already like one of the characters in his stories. I tell the lawyer to be there first thing in the morning and to Marie I say I'll take her home but she wants to stay there, maybe there is something she can do.

Naturally, when I get home I don't say anything to Sophie, she's



already upset she didn't hear from Harold for two days. Next morning, in the shop, I get a call from the lawyer, he's had a time, you can imagine, but finally he paid a fine, and Harold went away somewhere. I reckon Harold will surely come now to see me, I know he's worried what's going to be with the Sowolskis, so I call in Karp, I ask him about a place for the Sowolskis in the little apartment house he owns in Jackson Heights. He hasn't got a vacancy but he's got a place in the basement, could be remodelled for an apartment. I tell him to go ahead and remodel, I'll pay for it.

After this I'm waiting the whole day to hear from Harold. Nothing. When I get home Sophie is frantic, she didn't hear from Harold now three days. Next morning in the shop, Marie comes in. She looks nervous, like a child in a strange schoolroom. "Marie," I say, "come in. Why are you standing there by the door, like a stranger?"

She gives a laugh, embarrassed, and she says, "I didn't know how you'd feel about seeing me, after what happened."

"Don't be a child," I say. "Come in, sit down," and I take her hands and pull her into the office. "So. What's with Harold?"

She says, "He's gone away—to San Francisco. He wants to get away from everybody he knows and think things over. I guess that includes me too." She tries to smile but her face is real pale and there's circles under her eyes.

"Tell me the truth, Marie," I say. "What happened?"

"Well, Harold was terribly upset about the Sowolskis. Whatever he says, I know he feels guilty about having caused the whole mess." She looks down at her hands. "I guess maybe I picked the wrong time to lecture him but I couldn't help it. I was getting fed up too. I told him he had to live in this world, be a little practical, not out on Cloud Nine all the time. 'What do you want me to do?' he said. 'Crawl back to my father's place, beg him to take me back.' I told him that was something he'd have to decide for himself. And I also said I thought you had reason to be annoyed about the petition. A good employer has a right to expect a certain amount of loyalty from his employees."

"So?"

"So he said that was just a lot of talk, all I was really interested in was that he could make more money working in the dress business. He said the minute a woman gets hold of a man she goes to work squeezing out all his ideals, turning him into a domestic animal."

"So what happened, finally?" I ask her.

"Well, we agreed to break up and he said he was going away." And she starts to cry. I put my arms round her and she puts her head on my chest. "I'm not feeling so good myself now, I'm telling you. I realize suddenly the boy has run away, I made him, and I never even had a chance to say to him, 'I'm sorry, Harold, how I misjudged you.'" Finally she stops crying and says, "I'd better go now. I've got to get a job——"

"You got a job," I say. She looks at me and shakes her head and I say, "Marie, don't be a fool. Go back in the showroom, whatever happened got nothing to do with your working here. Miss Youssef has been bothering me every day, when are you coming back, she can't pin together a dress, the other girls either they stick out too much or they fall in in the wrong place, or something."

So she smiles, not the old time sunny smile but a beginning. Then she comes over and gives me a kiss, and she goes out to the showroom.

Well, it's about a week later, Sophie gets the first postcard from Harold, from Iowa, he's got a job on a wheat farm. It don't take two hours, I get a call from my sister Bessie. "So you accomplished finally," she says. "You turned your son into a real tramp."

"What number do you want?" I say.

"I got the right number," she says. "It's you who's got the wrong number. Oh, have you got a wrong number, Morris. I never thought when we were living with Mama, in Delancey Street——"

"Look, Bessie," I say, "maybe you got nothing else to do but write a Memoirs from Delancey Street but I got plenty to attend to——"

"I'm your sister, no?" she says. "I'm still part of your family, no? Even if my husband ain't rated in Dun and Bradstreet, I want to know what's going on. Sophie said you got a card from Harold, from Iowa. What kind of a state is Iowa?"

"That's what Harold's trying to find out," I say. "Maybe if he likes it, he'll buy it."

"Sophie says, in the postcard, he's working on a wheat farm. What does a boy like Harold know from wheat?"

"Maybe this is something he wants to find out too," I say.

"Some profession," she says. "All the time he was growing up, I only heard lawyer, doctor, engineer, architect. Now all of a sudden he's harvesting wheat. In Iowa."

"Do me a favour, Bessie," I tell her. "You got something to say, write to the *Times*. Please. I got a business to run."

Now in the middle of everything comes in a big package of books from Ferentzy. I give Marie one and Miss Youssef comes in one day, she sees me looking at them, she wants to know what is it. So I tell her it's a book of stories Harold wrote and she's very much interested, she's an intelligent woman, very fine education. "Mr. Seidman," she says, "I've got a friend who is a book reviewer. I'd like to have him read the book and give it a professional reaction." So I give her one of the books, I'm curious to know what this reviewer will have to say.

Well, a few weeks go by, I almost forgot about it, in the house Sophie is going round kind of sad, but she's getting used already to the idea Harold should be away again, like in Korea. One morning Miss Youssef comes in the office, she hands me a magazine and she says, "There's a review of Harold's book in this issue."

I take the magazine, sure enough it's there, just like it would be a book by a regular author, a best seller even. I got here a clipping, in my wallet, you could read it if you want.

In the presence of youth and talent one wishes to do more than simply dismiss as hopelessly amateurish a work which has obviously exacted much time, thought and dedication from its creator. One might say to the author of these angry, confused and compassionate stories—plainly a young man of great sensibility—alas, anger and pity are not enough. An author needs an awareness of his public and, beyond that, an awareness that reading is an exercise in recognition. Without that, one is merely a visitor at a waxworks, a locale more suitable for the emotion of horror—and of ultimate boredom.

Certainly, as a commercial item, it would be surprising if this book brought back the price of its attractive dust jacket.

Well, it could be worse, I suppose. He could have said, for instance, the book is an attack on the Government, and the F.B.I. should investigate, which frankly I wouldn't have been surprised, neither. You know my opinion about this book. But even so, from this review, I'm getting a little nauseous, for the boy.

I call Marie in and give her the article and I see her face is getting a little green, reading. "It's not exactly a rave," she says. "is it?"

"Not exactly," I say. "But Harold don't have to read it, at least."

"I'm not so sure of that," she says, and I see she gets a little pleat in her forehead, thinking.

Well, I didn't work out what she is going to do. It's maybe ten days later, I'm in the shop, I get a long-distance call. Omaha, Nebraska. I think it must be a customer of mine there, what do I hear, a voice is saying, "Hello," I almost fall over. "How are you, Pop?" he says.

How am I? I hear "Pop," from this already a person could get strong and healthy. But it's such a surprise, for a couple seconds I can't get my voice. "Pop," he says, "are you there?"

"I'm here, son," I say.

He says, "How's Mom? Jenny? Samson?"

"Everybody's fine. You need something? Money?"

"I'm all right," he says. "Pop, Marie sent me a review of my book. What made you change your mind? About printing it?"

"Well, I was wrong about one thing," I say. "You know what I mean.

So I thought I could be wrong about this too. After all, I could maybe be squashing down a masterpiece."

"Some masterpiece," he says. "Did you read this notice?"

"Well, he could be wrong too, the critic," I say.

"He's not wrong. But the book's not important any more. What's important to me is that you went ahead and had it printed."

"I wanted to surprise you," I say. "So you surprised me instead. You went away."

"I'm not sorry," he says. "It's been quite an experience, Pop. Quite an experience. Working, hitchhiking. Riding the goods trains——"

"Don't tell your Aunt Bessie. She'll have a heart attack."

He laughs, then he says, serious, "Pop, Marie wrote me what you did for the Sowolskis."

"Looks like a new man, Mr. Sowolski. His wife is working here, in a few months I could maybe get her in the union."

"That's wonderful of you, Pop," he says.

"What's wonderful? If you got a chance to do something for a person, why not? It's a world, after all. People got to act like people." All of a sudden my heart is in my mouth. I want to ask something and I don't want to. "So now?" I say finally. "You going on to San Francisco?" He don't answer right away and, over a thousand miles away, I can see his face, like when he was a little boy and he tried out for the first time his two-wheeler and he fell off, how he jumped up, real fast, he didn't want to show me he hurt himself.

"I wasn't planning to go on," he says. "I wanted to tell you I went in to see a man named Kittner at the Emporium here, in Omaha. I remember Larry talked to me about him. Mr. Kittner says he knows you from way back——"

"Yes, and he's a chiseller from way back too," I say. "This, I suppose, he didn't tell you."

"Well, he said you'd had some kind of a run-in, a long time ago. But we had a nice talk and I think we can do business with him."

"Harold," I say, "I heard something just now. A little word. *We* can do business with him, you said?"

So he says, after a minute, "That's what I said, Pop. I'd like to come back. Really go to work, learn the business. How about it?"

How about it, he says. "So come," I say. "Why are you wasting my

time on the phone? You'll be very welcome." It's like I would be asking him for Friday-night dinner but I can feel my hand is wet round the phone. I'm telling you, it's a peculiar thing, so much emotion.

Next day, seems fantastic, already he's in the office, telephoning Sophie. I'm expecting he'll be pale, skinny, rings under the eyes—what should I tell you, he looks wonderful, sunburnt, filled out, even taller again than the last time I saw him.

Well, that afternoon I'm pretty excited, you understand, I don't remember exactly what he said but I could give you an idea, what he told me about his experiences. "It's a great country, Pop," he said. "Seeing it gave me a feeling I never had before in my life. I was proud, and I felt like a fool, too. I know what that reviewer meant when he said you can't make a book out of anger and pity alone. You can't make a life out of it either. Not unless you want to live in a psychopathic ward. I want to build, Pop. Whatever it is. A business. A dress. I don't want to throw stones any more. I've had all I want of that."

I start to say something but he rushes straight on. "Like with the Sowolskis. I shot my face off and got them nothing but trouble. You stepped in and did something for them, with a wallet, not noise. You said it once. It's registered, finally. If you want to help people, you've got to *be* somebody yourself. You can't help anything by joining up with the misfits. I've found out something else these past months, Pop. The outcasts, the lost ones of the world—they used to break my heart. But you can't give all your heart to pity. I'll tell you something I found out that kind of rocked me. The misfits of the world, they're all wrapped up in themselves, in their own peculiar ideas, their own bitterness. You very seldom run into one that's interested in other misfits, in helping them. There's all kinds of personal reasons for human unhappiness, not just The System. Anyway, what I thought was The System.

"You know when you really learn something about people?" he says. "When you sit down to a meal—on a farm—oh boy, those farm breakfasts, Pop—or you stop for a hamburger somewhere, or cop a ride with a truck-driver. You know what? This is a capitalist country. Not just Wall Street or Pittsburgh. You want to talk to a real capitalist, it's the fellow who owns his own two-ton truck and does hauling, or he's got a tractor, or a bulldozer, or a combine, or a lathe, or a repair shop. Are they capitalists! They give the Wall Street guys cards and spades."

Well, it's kind of cute, you know, how he's discovered America and he's explaining me about it now. He could have found out the same thing here, in the shop, in the street downstairs, in the subway. But everybody's got to find out things his own way. The main thing is you should find out *some* time, they shouldn't lay you away in the cemetery the same ignoramus as you started out.

"Well, Harold," I say, "I only got two things to tell you. First, I want to apologize about the Madame Butterfly business. I was a big fool. It was a very insulting thing. I'm sorry. Now the other thing. I don't want you should forget your book, Harold."

He looks at me now, he don't understand. "I'm not talking about the writing," I say. "But what you had in your heart, when you were writing these stories. People got to have feelings, they got to care what happens to each other—for a young man to believe in this, to be willing to fight with his father about it—this is a fine thing, Harold. I learned something from you too, the last few months. And I'm proud you're my son. This is what I got to say, and I said it and now I'll call in Marie."

So I call her, on the public-address, she comes in, in a new little number, 864, a street dress with a sheath skirt and a bolero jacket, she looks in this, I'm telling you, a dream. She stands in the door a minute, she says, "Yes, Mr. Seidman," then she sees Harold and she looks for a minute as if she's going to faint. Then she runs over to him and she says, "Darling, darling," I don't know is she laughing or crying and both of them are saying, "Darling, darling," I got enough already, this is a conversation it's better in the movies, or private altogether.

Yes, he is with me now in the place. I'm just now getting printed up new stationery, Seidman and Son. How does it feel? Well, like I told you, I'm not a man who was all the time dreaming his son would take over the business. Ever since Harold was a kid I had always the idea he would be a big doctor, or lawyer—still and all, feels pretty good. Seidman and Son. Got a nice sound to it, somehow.

Marie and Harold? Of course they are married. They got a nice apartment, their own lives, their own friends. If they want to come sometimes for a dinner, Friday night, brunch on Sunday, fine. They are very welcome. But no possessive business. No sir.

You know something? It's very fine, what I just said. I would get an A from any psychologist. And I would like to throw away the

book and the kids should be over to the house seven times a week.

Sophie? Reconciled? On account of the religion? Listen, every Jewish family should only have in it a few Gentiles like Marie, they would be very lucky. And my Sophie, she is so crazy about this girl, I'm only worried our Jenny shouldn't get jealous.

Well, so again I chewed your ear off a whole afternoon. It's a ridiculous situation, you are the writer and I'm always telling you stories. So you want I should tell you something for this article you're going to write. All right, so where should I begin?

SEVEN

I'M GLAD you could join me here for lunch. How do you like this set-up? Pretty fancy, no? I tell you, in America anything can happen. A haberdasher becomes President. A general becomes a typewriter salesman. You made me a Dior to the Masses. And now I am a member of a country club. Morris Seidman from Delancey Street. You should hear my sister Bessie on this subject.

So, my writer friend, what brings you East this time of year, you could be sitting in Hollywood by a swimming-pool? You just escaped from a producer's basement?

Me? The family is fine, fine, couldn't be better. The only thing, I'm getting complaints from Marie, Harold isn't home enough. Since I made him a partner, this boy takes everything so serious, he is on the road practically all the time. He wants to meet every one of the accounts, personal.

Let's face it, he's pushing me out, little by little. Of course he tells everybody I am a genius, the business couldn't run without me. But me, he's always asking why I don't go to Florida, take Sophie for a holiday in Hawaii. Why do you think I joined a country club? He insists I need more rest and exercise. Wait, I'll be out there in California yet, with a yachting cap and a Flit-gun, spraying my oranges. You know something? I'm not looking forward.

Yes, yes, got to be careful these coming years. The Dangerous Age. My friend, Joe Wachtel, is already recommending me an analyst. If you would know why, you would laugh. You want to hear? All right so I'll

tell you. You remember you met my designer last time, Miss Youssef? You said she reminded you of Katharine Hepburn, a little? And I mentioned to you also my star salesman, Larry Kogen? Well, how should I describe you Larry? Handsome he is, no question. His character, well he's a good-hearted boy, he's got a soft spot for horses and slot machines, girls he's very considerate, he likes to give everybody a chance, and he's got a very long list. But the buyers are crazy for him and I'll tell you the truth, I'm fond of him too, even though I can't take him serious. Miss Youssef is another story. This is a high-type woman, educated, talented. Why is it like cats and dogs between her and Larry? Maybe this is the reason, he thinks she is snooty or something. He is all the time teasing her and a woman like this, creative, there's always big tensions anyway. So you can imagine.

I'll give you a scene. It's the time when we are changing the line, preparing for next season the new styles. My production man, Rosenzweig, is hollering at the pressers, the pressers are hollering at the finishers, the head machinist is running after the cutter with a scissors to stab him, the models are quitting, the union delegate is looking on every stitch, working out how he can squeeze from me another drop of blood. A regular circus. So, in the middle of everything Harold comes in, he's going on the road for a week, we're talking business, but I could see he's upset about something, so I ask him, he tells me it's nothing, he had a little discussion with Marie this morning.

"So what was she crying about?" I say.

He looks at me, shakes his head. "Pop," he says, "I've known you for a long time and I still underestimate you."

"Listen," I say, "in the first place I'm a married man myself, and besides, between father and son, radar is not a new invention. So I could guess what is the problem but maybe you would like to tell me."

"It's no problem," he says, "really. Marie is a wonderful girl but—women are so unreasonable."

"She thinks maybe you are working too hard, you don't spend enough time at home?"

"Yes. Can you imagine? I told her, if a person wants to take hold of a new business, really learn it, it takes time. Naturally I'm preoccupied. You'd think 'preoccupied' was a dirty word. She starts to cry. She says before we were married I was preoccupied with the state of the world,

now I'm preoccupied with business and she'd like me to be preoccupied with her for a change, before she's too old to care. So what's the answer to that one, for Pete's sake?"

"Well," I say, "I'm an old-fashioned man and from me you could only get old-fashioned answers. You got a career in the business. A woman's career is a family. She's entitled."

"But, Pop," he says, "we've only been married six months. I want to have a family but first I want to get established——"

"Harold," I say, "I said all I'm going to say. You work things out for yourself. Now tell me. You're going to be in Dallas, you'll see McKittrick there, I want you should straighten out with him once and for all. We don't send out merchandise on approval. Next season, let him order what he can use and keep it."

"Okay, Pop," he says. "I'll lay it right on the line." And he goes out.

So now the buzzer sounds. Very urgent. Miss Youssef wants to see me right away. So Miss Youssef comes in, with Larry together, and Doreen, she's got on a new number, pinned, looks very striking but a little extreme. Right away Larry starts in. "Look at this garment, will you, Morris? What's going on here?"

"Wait a minute, Larry," I say, "don't go off always half-crocked. What is the problem?"

"Well, look at it. I would like to get across to Miss Youssef one very simple idea. Plumage was intended by Nature as a mating device. Not a disguise."

"Mr. Seidman," Miss Youssef says, "I understood I was hired to design dresses for smart modern women——"

"Modern women," Larry says. "This is for the stratosphere. Be great on the first spaceship to Mars. I can just see the stewardess in it. With her aluminium head."

"Mr. Seidman," Miss Youssef says, "I'd like to have *your* decision on this number." She's twisting the scissors in her hand, and I know I just got to say one wrong word and I got no more designer.

"My decision, Miss Youssef," I say, "is I hired you to design the dresses and Mr. Kogen to sell them. Larry, I want you should keep your nose out of the designing-room."

"Thank you, Mr. Seidman," Miss Youssef says, and she gives Larry a look, he is cancelled, like a stamp, and she goes out.

"You know," Larry says, "if that dame would only get herself a man, we'd have a line with some oomph in it."

So this will give you an idea what's going on. One evening I got to stay a little late in the office, I go into the shop to close up, everybody is already gone, you know how it is with good union members, comes five o'clock, out, like shot from a gun. I'm walking by the designer's office and I hear a sound, at first I can't believe it. I go in, I see Miss Youssef is crying, not like a grown person, like a child. "Miss Youssef," I say, "what's the matter? Why are you crying?"

She says, "Why should I cry? Does a machine cry? Didn't you feed me my quota of chalk and pins today? Didn't I get screamed at and trampled on by everybody, from the production manager down to the pressers? What have I got to cry about?"

"Miss Youssef," I say, "I didn't come in here to have a debate with you why you are crying. So come with me downstairs, we'll have a bite to eat, and you'll tell me all about it, you'll feel better. So powder up the nose a little. The people in Longchamps will see my designer's been crying, they'll think we got troubles, right away will start the rumours, next thing the credit is chopped off, then I'll start crying and from this could come a flood altogether."

So she's smiling a little now, she goes to powder her nose and I leave word at the house I'm staying late in the shop.

First thing in the restaurant we order liver canapés and Miss Youssef asks for a stinger, brandy with some crème de menthe, it's a nice drink for a lady, and we start in to talk. she's an educated person, she knows a lot about opera, I'm a little bit of a fan myself, so we got things to talk, she orders up another stinger, we discuss a little about art, Michelangelo and Donatello is each another stinger, I'm afraid if we're going to go on like this through the whole Renaissance it could take maybe twenty, thirty stingers and I'll end up with her yet in the hospital. "So tell me," I say, "what happened that upset you so much?"

"It's an accumulation," she says, "but 816 was the last straw."

"That's the Picasso print you copied from Dior? Excuse me, I mean you were inspired by it. So what's the problem with 816?"

She sticks out a finger, almost in my eye. "Your production man, Mr. Seidman. Rosenzweig has no more feeling for style than Jack the Ripper. You know what he did with 816? He took the whole dress apart, it

takes too much material, the dress can't be made for the price and I can just take it out of the line and hang myself."

"Why didn't you come to me?" I asked her.

"Well, I don't like to come running to you twenty times a day. And that Larry Kogen. I think he stays up at night working out ways to torment me."

"Miss Youssef," I say, "Larry Kogen is staying up at night, yes. But believe me this is not the reason."

"I can't tell you how I detest that man," she says. "It's getting so I can't stand to look at him. Oh, he's good-looking enough, in a common sort of way, but he's so infuriating. That deceptively boyish air of his. He must be forty-five——"

"He's thirty-six, going on forty-five," I say. I know already the problem, it's not the first time it happened with Larry. "This boy has been working for me six, seven years, I got yet to hear from him three sensible words together. How can you take him serious?"

"Of course, you know him better than I do," she says. "But I would just love to teach that man a lesson. I really would."

"My dear Miss Youssef," I say, "I want to give you an advice. You're looking for a little adventure, take up parachute jumping, shark hunting. Something safe. Don't give Larry Kogen lessons. From this you could only get a broken head." I'm saying "head," it's only because it sounds foolish, "broken heart."

So she gives a laugh now, like a high-tone actress. "Please, Mr. Seidman," she says. "I can handle a Larry Kogen any day of the week."

Sure. And with four stingers I could maybe handle Marilyn Monroe. "Listen," I say, "take it from an old man——"

She puts a hand on my wrist, it's shaking a little like she would be cold, and it's making me feel—I don't know how to explain you. Just that I haven't got the heart to take away my arm from the table. "You're not old," she says, "you're still a young, vigorous man, with a great deal of understanding. A great deal."

"So have a little liver," I say, I make for her a canapé. She says, "Thank you," she puts it down by her plate, she takes from her handbag her handkerchief, a mirror and a lipstick, she makes up the lips, she puts down the mirror by her plate, she takes out a packet of cigarettes, keys and a cigarette lighter, she puts back in her bag the lipstick, the

handkerchief, the mirror, the keys and the biscuit with the liver, then she lights a cigarette.

"You're absolutely right," she says and now I'm afraid she's going to cry altogether. "I've always had a fatal attraction towards the wrong kind of man and it's about time it stopped. I'm thirty-two you know." She gives me now a smile, very appealing. "I don't do this very often," she says, "but it's been a great relief to let go. But you must be anxious to get home, and I really should go." I motion the waiter he should bring the bill, he's watching her like she would maybe be a fire-cracker, she's going to explode, but she walks very good, only stepping a little like it would be in feathers. I call a cab and I ask if she wants I should ride with her to the house and she says no, she's feeling better, really. So again she puts the hand on my arm, thin, like a child's hand. "Mr. Seidman," she says, "I've always known you were a good employer. Fair. Generous. But you have something much more important: An understanding heart. Don't lose it in this cold and crazy world."

She goes off in the cab and I'm standing there, I got all of a sudden a very peculiar feeling. This woman, she's got a certain form, face, I seen it nearly every day for more than a year—all of a sudden she puts her hand on my arm, I got an impression of an entirely different woman. I picture her now in my mind, she's paying off the cab driver, good evening to the door-man, to the lift-man, she's looking in her hand-bag for the key, maybe she finds there now the biscuit, and she feels funny, did she make a fool of herself with the boss, she comes in the apartment, she puts on the light, maybe she's got there a cat so she puts down the biscuit on the rug and watches the cat eat off the liver, you know how they do, so dainty, with the tongue?

Has she got a cat? Yeah, a Siamese, with blue eyes. Oh, I see. You're foxy. You want to know was I ever in her apartment? So I'm going to tell you. Well, I don't feel like going home right away, I decide to go back to the shop, see what's the problem there with Style 816. Rozenzweig says it takes three and a half yards, he's a good man, but he could be wrong too. This was in the old days my speciality, to lay out a pattern, so I could save some goods.

But now I got a little bit of a mood when I come into the place, I walk into the shop and I'm thinking, thirty years I've been at this business, comes six o'clock, turn out the lights—where is it? Where is the

worry, the aggravation, the dreams too—all right, dress manufacturer's dreams, it's not like da Vinci, but it's also got to do with—I don't know, not just a living, something else, like you would want to rinse out your name from day-time and hang it on a star, something to be proud, to be somebody. You come down to it, everybody is reaching for the same thing, in his own piece of sky. Well, and where is it, the dreams? In the piece goods? In the trimming department? In the fancy showroom I fixed up, with Danish modern, I spent in advance the money I will maybe make for two seasons if my Style Show is a success?

Well, I come by the cutting tables, I find the pattern for 816, I lay it out, start to figure, finally I see a way, if I lay on the skirt across the material instead of lengthwise, I can save a quarter-yard of material. Then I see I can also take out two pleats from the tunic, it won't hurt anything and will also save some material. And also, instead of French piping, I can make facings on the seams, and one thing and another, I could cut the cost maybe two dollars and at this price, 'with this much class, it could be a leader in the line. When I get home it's one o'clock, Sophie is reading in bed, cold cream on the face and curlers in the hair. "Where were you?" she says. "It's one o'clock."

So I'm getting a little annoyed, she sounds so strict, like a District Attorney. "I was in the shop," I say, "saving for you a little money you'll inherit when I'm dead from aggravation."

"For an aggravated man, you look very pleased with yourself. And who was the woman you were with at Longchamps, may I ask?"

You think the F.B.I. has an organization? "So," I say. "One of your private eyes sent you a report?"

"It happens," she says, "the Roselles were in Longchamps."

"So she's got to sit there, Mrs. Busybody Roselle, like a spy and run afterwards and call you up? She couldn't come over to me——?"

"Maybe she was embarrassed."

"Mrs. Roselle embarrassed! A barracuda is shy? Listen, I was in Longchamps with Miss Youssef, my designer."

"Your designer?" It's already a different tone of voice.

"Yes, my designer, and I'm giving you fair warning, Sophie. Next time I'm coming home and I find you with the cold cream on your face and those irons in your head, you wouldn't have with me an argument. I'm going right back to New York, to the club."

"What club?" she says.

"So I'll join a club," I say and I realize now it's ridiculous what's going on, I start to laugh; she starts to laugh and I'm wondering, why was I so excited, am I guilty, or what? I don't know. All I know, Miss Youssef is lonesome, she is alone, and for a woman thirty-two this is a tragedy. I look at Sophie, with those things in the hair, they look like snails, shiny, and I suppose to her, after thirty years, I don't look like such a prize package neither, but all of a sudden I see her very beautiful, sitting there. We are together, and for this you pay a price also, you got always an extra worry, you're afraid something will happen to the other part of yourself. But one thing you're not afraid. You're not afraid of a door, you open it and there's only an empty apartment, with only a cat maybe, standing on the rug.

Well, next morning, in my office, my friend Joe Wachtel is coming in. "You busy?" he says. "Come have a cup of coffee with me."

So I decide he wants to talk about his wife, he's always suffering, but he's a friend, you got to listen. I go down with him to Solowey's, we order coffee and he says, "Morris, I know you for a long time. I never stuck my nose in your business, right?"

"You got something on your mind," I say, "say it."

"I want to tell you something an analyst told me," he says. "Men our age, we got to be careful. You know, the youth is over, marriage is an old habit, and we're getting a little worried, could we attract a woman now, could we hold a woman——"

Can you imagine? Could he hold a woman. He should let go that prize of his for a minute, she would kill him. "So what is your advice, Joe," I say. "I should get an analyst or a woman?"

"I ran into Harry Roselle this morning," he says. "Morris, please, you got to remember your family, your business, your reputation——"

"Joe," I say, "I had dinner with my designer last night, we're getting out a new line now, she's tense, so I bought her a couple drinks, she should relax. So from this, Harry Roselle makes a whole *tsimmess*. Next time I will put up a sign, all the busybodies should know."

You think I'm maybe finished now with this nonsense? I'm not in my office five minutes, a telephone call. My sister Bessie, from Flushing. "Morris," she says, "you got somebody in your office? Or you're alone?"

"I got here a barber and a manicurist," I say, "and four dancing girls

and a boy with a fan, he's keeping away the flies. You know how it is with your rich brother."

"I got to talk to you," she says. "Very important. Your door is closed? Somebody could listen in on the wire?"

"It's something for the F.B.I.?"

"Morris, it's no joke. Myron just called me up. He heard a rumour, you were out, dead drunk, with a woman last night."

"Listen, Bessie," I say. "A man my age, I reckon it's getting pretty close to the end, I want to have yet a fling or two before they put me away in the cemetery."

"God in heaven," she says, "with my own ears I'm hearing this? You are making too much money. This will be your ruination."

"Ruinatation? Champagne, women? This never hurt anybody."

"Oh, Morris, Morris, thank God Mama is not alive today. What would she say, she should rest in peace?"

"She would say you are a big blabbermouth and mind your own business. Go back to your television already, Bessie. You are spoiling the whole Nielsen television rating there, in Long Island."

Well, you think *this* is the end? Comes in now Larry with a telegram from Martin's in Toledo. "They want to reorder 734," he says. "They'll take a run of sizes, all shades, if they can have an exclusive for Toledo."

"No exclusives," I say. "They want to order like everybody else."

"That's what I thought," he says.

He's still standing, I know I got to have another interview with the press. "What else is on your mind, Larry?"

"I hear you tied one on last night," he says.

"That was only the beginning," I say. "What a night. Fireworks. The rockets are still going off in my head. What's the matter, Larry? Why are you looking so stunned?"

"Well, I guess I'm a little



shocked," he says. "I'm a bachelor, but you're married. You've got a home, a family——"

"So what?" I say. "You said yourself, vanilla, vanilla—a man gets tired. He wants to try sometimes pistachio."

"Okay," he says. "But it shouldn't be flavoured with cyanide. A little bird told me you were out with Miss Youssef."

Well, how do you like it? Once in twenty-seven years I went on a big escapade. Dinner with my designer. But you think this is the end yet? Wait. All of a sudden, Larry has got nothing but good things to say about Miss Youssef, she is the greatest designer in the world, he tells her stories, brings her Cokes from downstairs. Well, Miss Youssef, I suppose, is in seventh heaven. But what is the big change with Larry? I'm curious. I call him in, I say, "How about going on the road next week, Larry?"

He gives me a quick look, suspicious—you know in the Bible, the story about David and Bath-Sheba? He sent away the husband to war, to get rid of him? He says, "We haven't got anything to show yet. Come on, Morris, what's the gag?"

"No gag. But you got nothing to do. No customers. You're hanging round the shop all day, you make everybody nervous."

So he says, "Morris, I like my job but I'm putting you on notice. You want to make a fool of yourself over Miss Youssef, you'll have to get past me. You can fire me. But I'm not going on the road." And he walks out.

So even if it costs Larry his job, he is going to save me from myself. Is this loyalty, or not? But maybe it's not just loyalty. Like I told you, there is something about Miss Youssef creeps into your skin—glass, something. Maybe, with Larry, all the fighting, the teasing before, it's like in the movies, it just shows he's really attracted.

That evening, Sophie is on the phone half an hour with my daughter-



in-law, Marie. At dinner I say, "Well, what was the big discussion?"

"Nothing," she says. "She's lonesome for Harold. She's getting new bedroom curtains. She saw a dress at Bonwit's that looks like your style 706. And she's going to the doctor tomorrow."

"Is she pregnant?" Jenny says.

"Jenny, this is your business?" I say.

"Morris," my wife says, "this is every woman's business."

Jenny gives me now also a look. She says, "Are they trying?"

"That's enough, Jenny," my wife says.

"I just asked a question about mating and reproduction——"

"Mating and reproduction," I say. "Beautiful words. For a horse doctor. Where is the mystery, the emotion——"

"You don't have to have a head full of lemon meringue," my Jenny says, "to feel emotion. If you're normal you have it. It's chemistry."

"Yeah? So tell me," I say. "This boy, Marvin Block, he's been around here lately. What is his chemical formula?"

So Jenny is blushing, finally. Sophie says, "That's enough, there's too much hostility going on here," and finished the discussion.

Hostility. Another word from the psychology book. Psychology and chemistry. What happened to sentiment in the world? From where is going to come the beauty in life, the poetry? From nuclear fission? From Mr. Freud? Take with writing for instance. Could you find somewhere a regular love story, should touch your heart a little? No. A man meets a woman, right away, wisecracks. Or first thing, the hero knocks the girl down, he says, "Let's understand each other, baby." Kiss Me Deadly. Kill Me Lovely. Love Me Dreadful. It's like people would be afraid nowadays to admit they got inside them a little feeling.

Well, anyway, I'm wondering what's going to be the upshot between Miss Youssef and Larry, I haven't got long to wait. On Friday she comes into my office, she has something she wants to discuss. "It's personal," she says, "do you mind?"

"We're friends, no?" I say. "Why should I mind?"

"You remember we talked about Larry Kogen? He's become very attentive. I don't know why. And—he's made me an offer. He wants me to go to Atlantic City with him for the week-end."

"So?" I say. "You want my congratulations?"

"You don't approve," she says.

"Miss Youssef," I say, "I'm your employer, not your guardian. You got to work out for yourself, what is best for you."

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could always work out what was best for us? No regrets, no wasted years?"

"It's not such a big problem, Miss Youssef," I say. "What's best is what's right. And a person is normal, he knows what is right, if he thinks about it a little."

"Well, I guess it's easier for some people than others," she says, and she turns round, she's going to the door.

"So you're going?" I say.

"No, I'm not," she says. She's not looking at me. "I find I have a previous engagement. I'm going to an Italian movie, *La Traviata*. I love to cry in Italian. It makes me feel educated." She gives me her crooked smile and goes out.

In the afternoon, Sophie calls up. There's a lecture at her club that night, a famous lady psychologist. Sophie is going.

I hang up and go out into the shop to see if Miss Youssef is still there. "You want company at *La Traviata*?" I say. "My wife don't like foreign pictures and she's going to a lecture."

"I'd love it," she says. "We'll have a bite first at my place."

So we go to her apartment, it's very fine, books, pictures, hi-fi, and there's her cat standing like a statue on the carpet, he looks me over, waits until I sit down, then he jumps on my lap. Miss Youssef puts a glass with whisky in my hand, turns on the gramophone and goes into the kitchen, and I'm sitting there like a Man of Distinction, with a Siamese cat yet on my lap. My sister Bessie should see this picture!

Well, what should I tell you, Miss Youssef fixed up a little snack with lobster, we had wine, very tasty, and she gave me with it a little travelogue from wines, I'm very glad to have the information, even though in my circle, if you squeeze in a little seltzer with some Manischewitz you would never go wrong. I looked at the label, Val Policella, and the light coming in slanty through the window, the way it matched the wine in the glass and inside of me such a strange feeling, how mysterious it is, life, how good it's been to me and how much I missed. Could you understand this, what I'm saying?

She's telling me meanwhile how she lived for a couple of years in Rome and she met there a young man, Italian, an artist, she was very

much in love with him. But something happened—they broke up. “You know what I miss most about Italy?” she says. “The talk. Men don’t talk to you here. They promote, or argue, or wisecrack. You’d love Italy,” she says. “You’d be right at home there.”

“You mean I’m talking too much?” I say.

“I mean I’m having a wonderful time. Please don’t stop.” And she gives me some coffee, and pretty soon I’m telling her things I haven’t thought of them for years, the early days in Delancey Street, the first time I wrote at night school a composition entirely in English: “An Immigrant Looks at America.” My teacher, she read it to the class and she told me afterwards she was proud of me, I had the soul of an artist. Made a big impression on my mind.

Well, we’re talking like this, I don’t realize how time is going by, the phone rings, I look at my watch. Nearly ten o’clock. Miss Youssef answers the phone: “Hello . . . Yes, I have. . . No, please, I won’t be here. . . Good-bye.” She comes back. “That was Larry,” she says, I see she is a little pale. “He wanted to know if I had company. Then he wanted to know what I was doing tomorrow.”

“So?” I say. “What are you doing tomorrow?”

“Well, I’ll maybe do a few of the art galleries.”

“You want company?”

“You still feel you have to bolster my morale?” I see there’s tears in her eyes, she pokes with a handkerchief at them, and I couldn’t explain you exactly how, seemed very natural at the time, anyway I’m holding her in my arms, and she’s got her head against my shoulder, like a child. Well, it’s a pretty wonderful feeling I got. Like I would be twenty years old again and there’s a whole new lifetime ahead of me, adventure, romance. So I say, “Miss Youssef, darling, I think we still got time for the movie, and afterwards I would like to buy you a beautiful chocolate soda.” And she doesn’t say anything, she gets her coat and comes back, we go out, in the lift she puts out her hand to me and I hold it, it’s such a good feeling, so strong, I couldn’t describe it. Like everything I missed in my life would be there. The shows I never saw when I wanted. The girls I didn’t take for walks in the park, the violinist I didn’t become, I used to dream of it a little, long ago.

We come out of the building, a taxi is there, who gets out? Larry. “Well, Morris,” he says. “Fancy meeting you here. Mind if I join you?”

All of a sudden my hotel is about the loneliest place in town." He's looking at Miss Youssef and she's looking at him, she's got that pale look again. "We're just going to a movie," she says. "It wouldn't interest you. It's *Traviata*."

"Why don't you come down off your high horse?" he says.

"Why don't you stop being so beastly?" she says.

All of a sudden I feel as if they don't even know I'm there any more. "Miss Youssef," I say, "it's after ten. By the time I get home will be after eleven. Maybe I'll skip the movie."

"That's a good idea, Morris," Larry says, "get yourself a good night's sleep. I'll give you a synopsis on Monday."

A synopsis. I got a pretty good synopsis of the whole situation. To Miss Youssef I say, "You want I should stay, I'll stay."

"No," she says. "It'll be long after midnight when we get out. I'm sure Mrs. Seidman would be concerned."

Well, I'm driving home, I got to laugh a little, but actually I'm kind of depressed. A woman puts her head on my shoulder. She's lonely and I acted towards her a little human, so she's grateful. So right away I got to make from it a federal case. Sitting there in the apartment, seeing myself altogether different, Jascha Seidman with a fiddle, Filippo Seidman with a beret. Such a fool. A fine production I made of my life altogether. From all the high ideas, An Immigrant Looks at America, what did I become? A tailor. All right, it's got a fancier name. Dress manufacturer. It's still a tailor.

I get home, Sophie is still awake, reading in bed. "How was the movie?" she says. "Did you go alone?"

"You got already a report from your F.B.I.?"

"I don't need the F.B.I. You've got lipstick on your collar."

How do you like that? Once in thirty years. Is this justice?

"Morris," she says, "I want to know one thing. Are you going to make a career of solving Miss Youssef's problems?"

"Why not? Two psychologists in the family instead of one."

"When I took up psychology, it was because I wanted to be a better mother, a better wife, a better person. I didn't know you resented it."

So all of a sudden I'm feeling like a dog but what can I do about it? I got nothing to say. So she starts to cry.

"Things can happen to a relationship," she says. "I'm not blaming

you. If only it hadn't happened the night I find out I'm going to be——" and she puts her face in the pillow.

It's like I would get a clon on the head. I think, she got bad news from the doctor, I throw myself down by the bed, I say, "Sophie, Sophie, what is it? Don't punish me. I didn't do anything. A woman was upset, I showed her a little understanding, so she put her head on my shoulder a minute, like a child, and she got lipstick on my collar. Sophie, please, tell me what is it?"

So she turns round. "Marie is pregnant," she says.

"My goodness," I say. "When? I mean, when did you find out? We got to do something, Sophie. Grandparents!" I look at her face. I can't believe it. Couldn't be I'm nearly fifty years old. It's only yesterday my wife told me she was expecting. Now my son is going to be a father?

"What's the matter?" she says.

"You should see your face now," I say. "You would think you are the one." So she blushes and I think, how wonderful. I'm going to be a grandpa and I got a wife who still blushes. And how beautiful she looks. A miracle, how she could keep the looks, so many years. "You're going to be a very beautiful grandma," I say.

Well, so what do you think? I got to go to an analyst? You say the analysts should come to me? Well, I think I'll stick to the dress business.

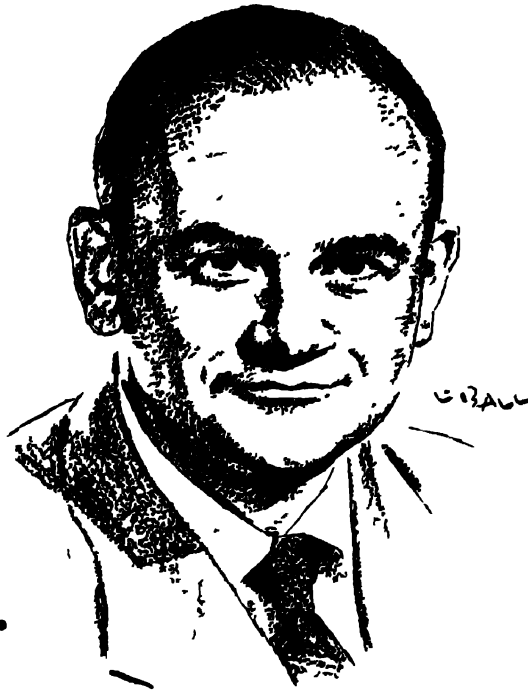
Larry? Oh, yes. Next Monday, he comes into the shop, whistling, cheerful like a bird. He says to me, "Morris, did you see that picture? *Traviata*? That death-bed scene! I'm telling you, I thought they'd have to carry me out. I cried like a baby."

"Well, there is still hope for you, Larry," I say.

"Yeah, that's what Rena says." He gives me a big grin. "We're getting married." He claps me on the cheeks with both hands. "Baby," he says, "wait till you see the line we get out *next* season."

Yes, now maybe there'll be less temperament, I'll have a little peace in the place. After all, Samson and me, we're getting to be pretty old dogs. Now that I'm going to be a grandfather, I would like to take it a little easy. I want to be around when my grandson is deciding which college to go to. Not that I'm going to mix in. No sir. I learned my lesson from my own boy. But tell me, you know something about Princeton? I understand they got there a wonderful school for science and, after all, these days, science is really the big thing. Don't you think so?

Elick Moll



ELICK MOLL grew up in Chicago and after two years at the university he left because doctors told him that he was going blind. Fortunately this diagnosis proved untrue, but it was many years before the fear was completely dispelled. In the meantime he organized a six piece jazz band (he had once intended to be a concert pianist); married; sold electric refrigerators from door to door (mostly unsuccessfully); and managed a music school.

He started writing about twenty years ago to distract himself from worrying after a motor accident which nearly cost his wife her life. Several of his short stories were published in American magazines and attracted the attention of Hollywood. Since then he has worked for almost every major film company and has written scripts for television.

Seidman and Son is not autobiographical, he says, he was never in the dress business, but his father was when he was a boy, and his father in law was a contractor with a dress shop in New York. Mr. Moll and his wife now live in Beverly Hills, California.

THE RAINBOW AND THE ROSE



Illustrations by John Worsley



THE RAINBOW AND THE ROSE

A condensation of the book by
NEVIL SHUTE

JOHN WORSLEY

"The Rainbow and the Rose" is published by Heinemann, London

IN THE treacherous west coast of Tasmania, Johnnie Pascoe, one of aviation's grand old men, lies critically injured after a desperate crash landing. Captain Ronnie Clarke, whom Pascoe taught to fly years before, volunteers to save him. For two harrowing days Clarke is involved in the rescue mission and, completely absorbed with thoughts of Johnnie, memories, intuitions and dreams reconstructing the older man's life come flooding through his mind.

The veteran pilot's career spans the years from the daredevil days of the First World War to the world-wide commercial flights of today. But behind the planes and pilots and pioneering exploits is the man himself, and a tender love affair that shaped his whole life.

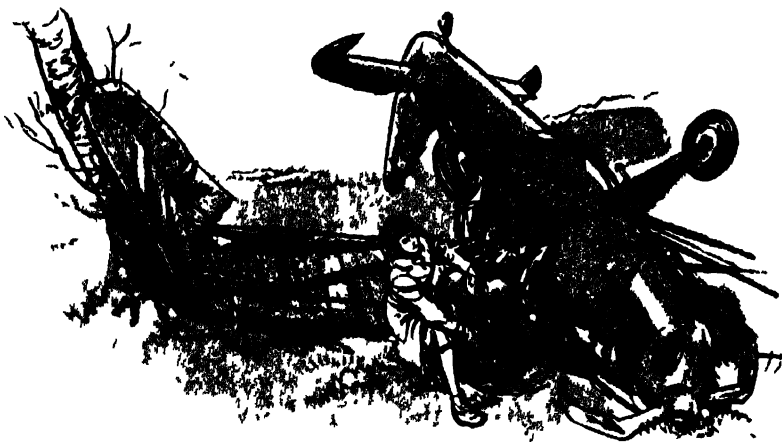
Only such a craftsman as Nevil Shute could master the bold and unusual story-telling technique that gives *The Rainbow and the Rose* its memorable quality.

"He is a superb story-teller."

—*The Manchester Evening News*

"It is well done, so brisk, so immediate, that I felt a tingle of something like personal excitement. I might have been there."

—Pamela Hansford Johnson in the
New Statesman



CHAPTER 1

JOHN PASCOE must have created something like a record for a pilot in civil aviation, because he went on flying a DC-6B across the Pacific on the Sydney-Vancouver run as a senior captain of AusCan Airways till he was sixty years old. The Department of Civil Aviation stuck their toes in then. They couldn't stop him flying because he was still perfectly fit and could pass every medical test they could think up. Perhaps they were afraid of what the papers might say if there should be an accident. At any rate, they refused to renew his licence for regular airline flying. He took his pension, bought three small aeroplanes out of his savings, and formed himself into a small flying club and superphosphate-spreading company at Buxton in Tasmania. Flying was his whole life and he had few other interests, so he went on flying.

He was unmarried; back in the dark ages before ever I knew him there had been a divorce. He was the healthiest man of his age that I have ever met; at the time of his retirement he used no spectacles and still had all his own teeth. He was a very good tennis player. On his summer leaves he used to go on pack-horse trips into the Canadian Rockies for the fishing, and at Nandi in the Fiji Islands, where he was based in his last year of airline flying, he did quite a bit of skin-diving.

I had known him for nearly thirty years; in fact, he taught me to fly

when I was eighteen, near Leacaster where my father was a solicitor. In 1942 I met him again in Cairo when he was flying a courier service to England. In 1944 he flew me home from Calcutta after I got shot up in Burma. I had met him many times since then, particularly in Australia. All my life I had known Johnnie Pascoe, quiet, grizzled and competent. He was a part of my experience.

Buxton is a little place in north Tasmania. I had been there once before Johnnie Pascoe's time. I was flying a DC-3 from Hobart, Tasmania, to Melbourne in the winter in deteriorating weather when an oil-pipe on the port engine split just as I was starting on the crossing of the Bass Strait, so that I had to stop that engine. I didn't feel like going on across a hundred miles of sea like that and Area Control agreed with me. Hobart had closed in by that time and Launceston wasn't too good, so they sent me in to Buxton, which has dead-flat country. I slithered in over the fence and put her down and boy! was I glad to be on the ground! So were the passengers.

I don't think the population of Buxton can be more than three thousand, though it is the centre of a prosperous grazing district. It has one hotel, so bad that the commercial travellers drive long distances to avoid it. It's not a town that I would care to live in, but I'm not Johnnie Pascoe. There was quite a bit of minor flying to be done there, and I suppose that's why he went. He had a Tiger Moth fitted up with a canister for spreading fertilizer from the air, and he had two Austers for instruction and charter flights. A ground engineer called Billy Monkhouse looked after his aeroplanes. Johnnie lived in a small house just by the airport; he went duck shooting in the autumn and trout fishing in the spring. He got the sort of life he wanted, I suppose.

He always looked about the same, from the time I first remember him: five foot nine in height with partially grey hair, regular features, rather a fine face, tanned, a little lined. He hadn't got a great deal of humour; he was rather stiff. Women liked him, but I don't know that he liked them very much; at any rate, he gave the impression of being careful. "Once bitten, twice shy," he told me once.

He was born a Canadian. He went to England as a flight cadet to train with the Royal Flying Corps in 1915, and lived and worked in England and the Far East all the time between the wars. He got his job with AusCan after the Second War.

Well now. I emigrated to Australia when I got married just after the Second War. I joined Australian Continental Airways and I've been a captain with them for the last five years. In July of last year I was on the Sydney-Melbourne run flying a Viscount. I used to take up Flight 82 in the late afternoon, get a three-hour break in Sydney, and bring back Flight 156. It left at eight twenty-five and got to the Melbourne airport at half past ten at night. I didn't like that duty much. One got to Sydney after the shops had shut and with too little time to go to the pictures. I like to be at home in the late afternoon because of reading to the kids before they go to bed. I like to help them making models, dressing dolls, and all that sort of thing. Instead, I had to stick around at the Sydney airport five hundred miles away, reading a book in the pilots' room, listening to the radio or snoozing in a chair.

I was sitting there one evening half asleep, listening to the radio and the wind outside and the rain beating on the window—that year we had a terrible July. The seven o'clock news was just coming on, and I sat dozing through all the stuff about Egypt and the Middle East; then there came a bit that jerked me awake. The announcer said something like this:

"Tasmania: Captain John Pascoe, flying a small aeroplane on an errand of mercy, crashed this afternoon on a small airstrip near the Lewis River on the west coast. He was attempting to land to bring Betty Hoskins, aged seven, into hospital. She is suffering from appendicitis. There is no practicable land route to the Lewis River and no vessel has been able to enter the river for the last ten days owing to westerly gales. Captain Pascoe is reported to have sustained a fractured skull."

I was upset by this news. When I went for briefing I asked the Control Officer, "Did you get any more on Johnnie Pascoe?"

"Not much. Hobart sent a machine out just before dark, but it didn't get far. Weather's clamped down over the mountains."

"They got the news over the radio?"

"That's right. They've got a transceiver at the Lewis River."

I had already got the weather gen for my flight, but I went back and saw the Met Officer again. I asked him, "What's the form for tomorrow on the west coast of Tasmania?"

He turned to his weather-chart, and stood tapping his pencil against it. Then he laid it on the chart. "There's this depression stationary

at the eastern end of the Bass Strait. It's been there for four days. There seems to be another forming to the south-west—*here*." He traced a little circle on the chart.

"Get a clear interval before the second one comes up?"

"I could tell you better tomorrow morning. If we do, it'll deteriorate again. It's like that at this time of year "

I went out to the aircraft and put all this out of my mind. When you're doing pre-flight checks you only want to think about the pre-flight checks. It was a miserable night with a strong south-west wind and rain lashing against the machine.

When we were on our way climbing upon course I had time to think about Johnnie Pascoe again, and the more I thought the less I liked my thoughts. The west coast of Tasmania must be one of the most inaccessible districts in the world. It's only about a hundred miles from Hobart but there are no roads; only a bush track that you can walk along and that doesn't go within forty miles of the Lewis River.

The mountains stick up in pinnacles all over the country, sort of haphazard. The valleys that meander round these islands of mountain are filled with bush so dense that you have to cut your way through with a matchet.

When you get towards the coast you come upon occasional plains, but these are button-grass plains where no feed grows that will sustain a horse. You can't work a horse in that country at all. If you want to get in to the Lewis River you must go on foot, packing all you need for the next week on your back. Or you can go round the coast in a fishing boat if the weather is good enough for entering the estuary, which is uncharted and unbuoyed. Or you can fly in to their tiny airstrip. That was what Johnnie Pascoe had tried to do.

When we were half an hour from Melbourne I spoke to the Tower at Essendon airport and got clearance to let down. When we were steady on the let-down I asked the controller if there was anything fresh on Johnnie Pascoe.

"Nothing," the controller said. "I don't suppose there will be till the morning. The woman's there alone."

"What woman?" I inquired. "Over."

"They're tin miners," he explained. "Mr. and Mrs. Hoskins and two children. They've got a surface working. They just dig up earth and

wash the tin out of the soil. They've got a diesel-engined boat. Hoskins took it to Hobart a fortnight ago to fetch stores. Now he can't get back."

I frowned. "They've got some neighbours? Over."

"There's not another house for thirty miles. The woman pulled Captain Pascoe out of the machine and got him to the house."

"Is there a data sheet for the airstrip?"

"There might be. I'll look and see."

We got into Essendon at about a quarter to eleven. I waited till the passengers were all off and then hurried through the rain to our office. I glanced at the movements board. There was a Dakota freighter scheduled to leave for Launceston at one a.m. I ran through the rain to my car and drove to the Tower. The controller handed me the data sheet for the Lewis River airstrip. "It's not a licensed field," he said.

It certainly wasn't. It was one tiny runway six hundred and thirty feet long and only forty feet wide. It ran approximately north-west and south-east, across the prevailing wind. The approaches were unobstructed, and it had a hard surface. It was built on a ridge because the ground fell away steeply towards the west; at one point the plan was marked "Cliff 50 ft." only a few yards from the runway. To the east the slope was more gradual and here was the legend, "Ground soft and uneven." There was a mountain two thousand four hundred feet high about four miles to the north-east which might be a bit of a trap in bad weather, and a lot of little hills and escarpments dotted about.

The rain beat and drummed on the glass walls of the control-room around us. "It's pretty small," I said at last.

"They don't use it much. The Hobart Flying Club bring them the mail once a week. Generally they drop it as they fly over. They *do* land light aircraft in fine weather."

"This is the only strip in the vicinity?"

He nodded. "Hoskins and his wife made it themselves."

"Any more on Johnnie Pascoe?"

"They've closed down for the night. They'll be speaking on the morning schedule, at seven o'clock."

"How did all this begin?"

"The kid got sick two days ago. The mother got on the radio, and they got the doctor on the other end. He diagnosed appendicitis, and said she had to be brought into hospital."

"Easier said than done."

"That's right. They sent a machine out from Hobart, twice. They couldn't make it over the mountains, and they hadn't got the range to go round the south coast in anything that could make a landing on the strip. Then Pascoe said he could make it from Buxton. It's about a hundred and ten miles flying down the coast from the north. He tried yesterday morning in an Auster. It was clear when he took off, and raining by the time he got there—visibility less than half a mile. He waited for it to clear, circling over the sea until his fuel was getting low, then came back to base. He went off again yesterday afternoon. The woman said that he made three attempts to land—touched his wheels each time and took off again. The fourth time the machine turned upside down in a gust that carried it off the runway."

I glanced down at the plan. It was several hundred yards to the homestead. "She got him to the house?"

He nodded. "She must be a pretty good kind of girl. She had the child in her arms at the runway ready to pop it into the machine, so the pilot wouldn't have to leave his seat. She put the child down and pulled Pascoe out of the wreckage. She says he's got a big dent in his head where the skull's caved in, a broken thigh, and possibly other injuries."

I could imagine the scene—just one woman in the rain and the wind. "What did she do then?"

"She left him lying on the ground and ran back with the child to the house. Then she came back with hot-water bottles and blankets. She knows about shock, apparently. Then she ran back to the house and got on the blower to Hobart. She's got the standard medicine chest and they told her to give him morphine. She gave him that and then she got their tractor and a sled, and put him on the sled, and got him to the house and into bed."

"What's the form about the weather?"

"They're hoping for a few hours clear tomorrow. If it clears they'll send out a machine from Hobart, with a doctor."

"Is there anyone who could fly an Auster down from Buxton if it *doesn't* clear?"

"So far as I know, Pascoe was the only experienced pilot there."

Responsibility for Johnnie Pascoe descended squarely on my shoulders. I turned to the controller. "Mind if I use your phone?"

I rang our operations manager and asked if he could spare me for a day or two to go over on this thing. He grumbled a bit, but he couldn't very well refuse, and besides, he knew Johnnie Pascoe, too.

"I'm going on Flight 117, the freighter," I told the controller, "to Launceston. Then I'll go by car to Buxton and see what the form is. When you're speaking to Hobart, would you tell them I'm on my way?"

I folded the data sheet about that rotten little airstrip and put it in my pocket, went down to the car and drove off home.

Sheila had gone to bed; she came out in her dressing-gown to meet me in the hall. "You're late, Ronnie," she said. "Did you have a bad trip?"

"Not too bad," I told her. "But there's been a bit of drama in Tasmania. Johnnie Pascoe's bought it."

"I heard it on the news. I'm sorry."

"I'm going over there," I said. "See if there's anything I can do. There's a freighter in about an hour's time. I want my leather coat and helmet."

She stared at me, astonished. "Your leather coat? I haven't seen it for years." She stood in thought. "I think it might be in the trunk under Diana's bed."

"Would the helmet be with it?"

"It might be. Peter had that when he went to that fancy-dress party at school."

Diana woke up when we pulled the trunk out from under her bed, and sat up sleepily. "Wha's the matter?"

"It's all right, darling," Sheila told her. "Go to sleep again. We just want Daddy's coat. He's going flying."

An eight-year-old is easily satisfied. She lay down and turned on her side; I tucked the bedclothes round her shoulders and she went to sleep immediately. The coat was there and we found the helmet in Peter's room. Sheila said softly, "He puts it on sometimes, in front of the looking-glass."

We closed the door quietly behind us. "You'd better have something, Ronnie," she said. "Toast and cocoa?"

It was a good idea, because I would be up all night. She went into the kitchen and I went into the bedroom and stuffed a little haversack full

of pullovers and warm clothes. Whatever things were like at Buxton, I was going to be damn cold. I put the haversack down in the hall beside my coat, and wandered out into the workshop. Peter and I were planning a surprise for Diana. We were building her a doll's house for Christmas, a big one with six rooms. I had got the plywood and timber, and we had laid out the baseboard. I stood looking at the drawing. I had a surprise for Peter also, a flying model aeroplane with a small diesel engine, that I was building in the workshop at the airport.

I stood in the workshop, savouring my home. Sheila came to me in a few minutes.

"The toast's ready," she said.

"What colour shall we have the drawing-room?" I asked.

"Pale-pink walls. She likes pink."

I went to the kitchen and ate the snack she had prepared. Presently I glanced at my watch, and it was time to go.

She said, "Don't go and buy it yourself, Ronnie."

"I won't do that," I promised her. "There's trouble enough over there already."

I put my old leather coat on and kissed her; she came to the door with me. "Will you be able to ring me?" she asked.

"Tomorrow night," I said.

I drove back to the airport and locked the car up in the park. We took off on time in the freighter and settled down to a long flight against the head wind. I sat on the floor with my back against the freight, dozing; it was cold and draughty and noisy in the unfurnished shell. It was about half past three in the morning when they put her down at Launceston.

We had radioed the airport control to ask them to get a car to drive me sixty miles to Buxton. It was waiting with a very sleepy driver. It was past five when we got to the little town, and I asked the driver to take me to the hotel.

When we got there, I knocked on the door for a few minutes, with no result. Then I went round the back and found the kitchen door unlocked. I entered the kitchen, and switched on the light. It was pretty dirty and smelt a bit, but it was warm. I was hungry again so I made myself a cup of tea and boiled a couple of eggs on an electric cooker.

It was still dark outside at half past six, and there was no movement

yet from upstairs in the hotel. The woman at the Lewis River would be speaking on the transceiver at seven o'clock; I must get to a radio. I wrote a note for the hotel on a page torn from my diary and left it on the table with a ten-bob note to soothe any ruffled feelings, and went out into the street. The wind was still high and there was a little rain.

It didn't take me long to find the police station. When I opened the door a young constable got up from a desk. Behind him on a table was the black metal case of a transceiver.

He said, "Guid morning," in a strong Scots accent.

"My name is Clarke," I said. "I'm a captain with Australian Continental Airways." I went on to tell him why I'd come to Buxton. "Mind if I listen in on the morning schedule?"

"There'll be others coming to hear that," he said. "Mr. Monkhouse, the ground engineer, and Sergeant Farrell. Nae doubt they'll be making a great effort to get him out of it today." A very old Ford Anglia drew up in the street outside. The constable glanced out of the window. "Here's Mr. Monkhouse now."

He was an oldish man, dressed in a roll-neck sweater under a soiled sports coat. He had once had red hair, now turned mostly grey. He had a merry face and, I guessed, some affinity for beer that might have prevented him from rising higher than ground engineer at a small flying-club. His face struck a faint chord of memory in my mind. I said, "We've met before, haven't we?"

"Burma," he said. "I was with the army, servicing L-5's. You were in 607, Spitfires. And I remember you at an air pageant in Yorkshire in 1930. You learned to fly at Leacaster."

"You've got a memory," I remarked. "And you must have been in aviation a long time."

He nodded. "Pretty near as long as Captain Pascoe, and that's saying something. You come to fly him out?"

"We'll see," I replied. "The Hobart Club may have got something laid on by this time. What have you got here?"

"There's an Auster and a Tiger," he said. "The Auster would be better. Got a blind-flying panel. You can stick a stretcher in its rear fuselage, too."

"Is the Auster ready?"

"Filled her up and did the daily last night."

The sergeant came in and turned on the transceiver to warm up. Presently it came to life, and Hobart came on the air: "This is 7 HT. Good morning, everybody. This morning I'm taking 7 KZ first; 7 KZ, if you are listening, will you come in, Mrs. Hoskins."

There was a momentary pause; and then, "This is 7 KZ," said a woman's voice. "Over."

"How are your two patients? Over."

"Well, Betty's better. Her stomach doesn't feel so rigid, her temperature's below a hundred and she drank a little milk. Captain Pascoe, he seems just about the same. I gave the second injection at midnight, like the doctor said."

"Is he conscious?"

"Well, it's hard to say. I don't think he's feeling much pain, though. Sometimes his eyes are open, and then it's as if he's looking at things. Over to you."

"Tell me about the weather, Mrs. Hoskins."



"There don't seem any difference to what it was yesterday."

"According to Met, it ought to be clearing soon from the west, away over the sea. Is there any sign of that?"

"If you'll hold on a minute I'll go out and see." In a few minutes she came on again. "It's showing a little line over on the horizon, like as if it was clearing behind the rain."

"Good-oh. I'm going to switch you through now to Dr. Parkinson. We shall want to speak to you again before the machine takes off. Can you be listening at half past eight?"

"I'll be listening. After I've spoken to the doctor, can I speak to Don?"

"He's here with me, Mrs. Hoskins. I'll put you through to the hospital now, and Don will speak after that."

I lit another cigarette and we stood listening to the consultations. Dr. Parkinson took the child first, and was satisfied that she was better. So far as Pascoe was concerned, he was principally worried about infection of the head wound, and he gave her very elaborate directions about dressing it. Then he said, "That's all for now, Mrs. Hoskins. I'll be speaking to you again from the airport before the machine takes off. It's just possible I might be coming with the machine. Now back to the control."

We listened while the woman talked to her husband. Don Hoskins was weatherbound, tied up at the quay in Hobart; the report from the Maatsuyker Island lighthouse on the south coast showed the weather to be impossible for small craft.

The announcer said, "Before we go on with the schedule, has any other station anything to say about Lewis River?"

The sergeant touched a switch and spoke into the microphone. "This is 7 PC, Buxton. There is a Captain Clarke here wants to speak. Over."

"Okay, Buxton. Put Captain Clarke on."

I went to the microphone and said, "Clarke speaking. Have you heard anything about me from Essendon? Over."

"We had a message to say you were coming. We're very glad there's a pilot at Buxton. What aircraft have you got there?"

"There's an Auster fuelled and serviceable."

"This break in the weather that's coming won't last longer than two or three hours. After that it's going to clamp down again, for days perhaps. The Met don't think there's going to be much reduction in the

wind velocity. If that's right, we shan't be able to go round the south coast from here unless we take the Proctor, and that's not got a hope of landing on that strip. We shall try it across the mountains with an Auster, taking the doctor as a passenger, with his operating gear. We hope to be able to fly so slowly across the strip into wind that he'll be able to jump out without hurting himself. But it may not be possible to go over the mountains at all. Over to you."

"It's a job for a parachute doctor, surely?" I said. "Over."

"I know it is, but we haven't got one."

"I can make the Lewis River down the coast," I said. "Tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it. Over."

"Are you willing to try and put a doctor down? Over."

I paused. It was years since I had flown an Auster. "I'm game to try," I said.

"What's the weather like with you, now?" he asked.

"Hold on." I went outside. There was a line of blue sky down on the horizon to the west. I hurried into the police station and went to the microphone. "Clarke speaking," I said. "It's breaking over to the west, about twenty miles away. With this wind it might be clear in half an hour. Over."

"Have you got a doctor there with surgical experience, who would be willing to try it?"

I asked the sergeant about it. He took the microphone. "Sergeant Farrell," he said. "Dr. Turnbull lives here. He does surgery on accidents and that. He's young and active. Only come out of medical school two or three years."

We left it that the sergeant would take me to see the doctor and we would speak again at half past eight. I turned to Monkhouse. "We'll have to hop around now," I said. "Will you go to the airport and run the Auster up? I want to do two or three landings on her before I take off for the Lewis River. I'll come out to the airport after I've seen the doctor."

I went with the sergeant to the police car.

"Dr. Turnbull lives with the Reverend and Mrs. Haynes," the sergeant said. "He's got a surgery in a room in an office building, but he won't be there yet. I'll take you to the vicarage."

"Do people like the doctor?"

"Oh, aye. He's Tasmanian—his father has a fruit farm on the Huon River. We never had a doctor here in Buxton till he came. Used to have to get a doctor from Devonport before."

CHAPTER 2

WE DROVE about a quarter of a mile to the church. It was a stone-built church with a square tower. Beside it was a forbidding, two-story vicarage with Gothic windows.

We knocked on the iron-bound front door, and it was opened by a small boy in shorts and a sweater. The sergeant asked if we could see the doctor. He ran back to the kitchen and we heard him say, "Mum, there's people to see Alec."

The vicar's wife came to the door, a little grey, a little portly, with a good-natured face. "Good morning, Sergeant," she said. "I was letting the doctor lie. He was out till four in the morning with Mrs. Jardine's baby. Is it urgent?"

"It's about Captain Pascoe. We want him to fly to Lewis River."

"Oh. Well, come upstairs." She led the way to the top floor and opened a door. "Just wait in there and I'll tell him."

It was the doctor's sitting-room and it wasn't much. There was a square of threadbare carpet in the middle of the floor, a table with a knitted doily in the middle of it and an ash-tray upon that, two upholstered chairs with broken springs before a fire-place in which no fire had burnt that winter, and one small wicker-seated chair at the table. There was a horsehair sofa with one leg missing, supported on a chunk of wood. A faded print of the Good Shepherd hung above the fire-place. A small bookcase housed medical volumes and a few paper-backed novels.

We stood in the cold room waiting, and presently the doctor came in, bleary-eyed from sleep, hair tumbled, doing up the cord of his dressing-gown.

"Morning, Sergeant," he said thickly. "What can I do for you?"

I learned later that he was twenty-eight, but that morning he looked about fifteen. He was about five foot seven, slight in build, and he had the clear skin and staring red hair of a boy.

"Sorry to wake you, Doctor," said the sergeant. "This is Captain

Clarke of Australian Continental Airways. We're waiting on a call from Hobart now about flying in a doctor to Captain Pascoe. Captain Clarke could maybe fly you in."

The boy rubbed a hand over his face and shook his head a little. "What's he got? Fractured skull, isn't it?"

"He's got a fractured thigh as well, they say."

"What about the other one? The appendicitis?"

"The report on the morning session was that she's better."

The doctor plunged his hand into the pocket of his dressing-gown and produced a packet of cigarettes. He offered them to us and we each took one. He lit them for us, and lit his with another match. "I couldn't do a major operation there," he said. "It's like asking anyone to set up a hospital with—nothing. You'll have to get them out to where the job can be done properly."

"There doesn't seem to be much hope of getting them out," I said.

"Why not? There's an airstrip."

He was stalling. I couldn't help being sorry for him in his predicament. He looked so young, so inexperienced. He was tired, too. "The Hoskinses could only make a very short strip there," I said. "It's no more than a little bit of road on top of a ridge. To land even the smallest aeroplane you'd need perfect weather and the wind blowing straight along the strip. Now we've got a wind that won't be less than thirty miles an hour blowing dead across the strip. I can't land in a cross wind like that, not in a lightly loaded aeroplane. Johnnie Pascoe tried it yesterday."

He looked at me, a little sullenly. "If you can't land there, what's the use of talking?"

"There *is* one thing that we can do. I can fly slowly across the strip, heading into wind. I won't be more than five feet up—I may even be able to touch my wheels. We'll be flying at about forty miles an hour into a thirty-mile-an-hour wind, so we shan't be doing more than ten miles an hour—I might even be able to hold her stationary for a few seconds, with the wheels on the ground. An active man could just step out on to the strip. In any case, it wouldn't be much of a jump."

We stood in silence, and Mrs. Haynes came clumping up the stairs and into the room. She had a tray with three cups of strong tea on it, and a bowl of sugar.

"I brought you some tea," she said comfortably. "It's still blowy outside, but it looks as if it's fining up. We might be going to have a nice day."

We thanked her and she went out. "You could break a leg trying to jump like that," Dr. Turnbull said.

"I wouldn't ask you to break a leg," I said patiently. "We don't want any more casualties there. If I can't make it so that you can just step out, we'll come home again."

"Suppose I were to do that, I couldn't hope to do much for either of them." He stared up at me with hostility. "You know all about aeroplanes. Well, you don't know much about medicine. Am I supposed to do a wonder operation on a fractured skull with nothing but a blunt penknife and a kettle of muddy water? Or take out an appendix? There's not a hope of a successful operation. Both patients would die."

The sergeant said quietly, "A cup of tea, Doctor." He gave me one too.

"If I can land you, I can land your instruments," I said, "and anything else you'll need—a sterilizer, perhaps."

"Don't talk rubbish," he said irritably. "There's no electric current. There's only one thing to be done. They'll have to send a party in by land. They can fly to Lake Pedder, can't they? Well, it can't be more than thirty miles from there."

I shook my head. "I doubt if they'd make Pedder, with all this low cloud. It's in the middle of the mountains." I turned to the sergeant. "How long would it take them to get through?"

He rubbed his chin. "They can get a truck as far as Kallista. Then there's a track to the Gordon River. That's about twenty miles. After that, another forty miles over the mountains and through the bush. I'd say it might take four days."

I asked the doctor, "Would they be alive in four days?"

"The girl will. From what you say, her appendix is subsiding. That often happens. She'll be able to walk out by then."

"What about Captain Pascoe?"

He was silent. We all stood looking at each other.

At last I said, "Well, that's the position. Hobart is going to send Dr. Parkinson and try to land him in the way I said. But I don't think they'll make it."

Dr. Turnbull stood in silence. "I don't want you to think that I'm afraid of jumping out," he said at last. "It's what comes after that I don't like. I can't see any hope of a successful operation. If I operate and then he dies, just think what the papers will say!"

It seemed to me that it was time to be brutal. "You'd better think what they will say if you refuse to go, and he dies."

He stood there biting his lip.

"We're all in a bit of a jam over this," I said. "You, most of all, perhaps. We'd better do the best we can. I'll give you a good break with the press. I'll tell them you insisted on going at the risk of your life."

He still hesitated. "All my other patients . . ."

The sergeant asked, "You got anything urgent?"

"Not exactly But I can't just run out"

"The district nurse is here," the sergeant said.

"If I went I'd have to take an awful lot of things, some of them liquids, in bottles. They'd get broken."

"Pack them with a lot of padding in a suit-case," I said. I guessed that he was trying to think up a few more objections. It was time to cut him short. "Well, that's all fixed, then," I said. "I think you've made the right decision. I'm going out to the airport now. I'll be back in the police station at half past eight, to hear what Hobart has to say. Have all your stuff down there then, and we'll make a quick get-away while the sun shines." I moved towards the door with the sergeant. "See you then."

On our way out to the airport, I asked the sergeant, "He does do surgery?"

"Well, yes," he replied. "Derek Hepworth, he fell off a roof and broke his leg, and the doctor set that all right. He's a Bachelor of Surgery."

"Has he done any operations here? An appendicitis, or anything like that?"

He shook his head. "We haven't got a hospital. Anything like that would go to Devonport."

I was worried. "Look, Sergeant," I said. "What do you really think about all this, yourself?"

"I don't like it," he said. "I don't think he wants to do a fractured skull—at the Lewis River or anywhere else."

"He must have done a fractured skull or two, in hospital."

"Aye," said the sergeant. "But that's different to doing it upon the kitchen table at the Lewis River."

The burden of the decision rested squarely on me. I was bullying an unwilling and inexperienced young doctor into doing an operation which he clearly felt to be beyond his capacity. I was doing this because Johnnie Pascoe had a fractured skull and there was no time to get a better surgeon. But what if the weather forecasters were wrong? What if it should be a brilliant, sunny day, with a gentle breeze so that Dr. Parkinson could be flown up from Hobart with time remaining for me to land him on the Lewis River strip?

I looked up, and the sky was blue to the west right down to the horizon, with every promise of a fine day. I made up my mind. "I'll fly Dr. Turnbull in," I said, "and get back here as quick as I can. While I'm away, we'll try and get Dr. Parkinson here, and I'll fly him in too."

The airport at Buxton is a grass field a mile from the town, about six hundred yards square. No scheduled air service flies to it; sheep graze on it occasionally and have to be herded off before a landing. There is one corrugated-iron hangar with a tattered wind-sock on the gable, capable of housing four or five small aeroplanes. This hangar had a board on it, PASCOE FLYING SERVICES LTD., in need of a new coat of paint.

Billy Monkhouse had got the Auster out and was running it up outside the hangar in the gusty wind; he had two boys hanging on to the wing struts to prevent it blowing away. The conditions were not good for flying a light aeroplane, and I hoped that my hand hadn't lost its cunning. Presently Monkhouse throttled down, and raised one thumb. I moved to the door as he got out. "I'll do about three landings," I said. "Get the boys to stay on the wing struts while I taxi out downwind."

I sat in the machine for several minutes, trying to accustom myself to the size again after years of flying airliners. There my seat when the machine was on the ground was nearly twenty feet up. Here it was about three feet from the ground. The horizon came just so upon the windscreen; that was how it must be when landing. The grass looked so. With a glance down I could actually see one wheel on the ground. There was the throttle and the mixture control, there the flaps. I waved the chocks away and nodded to the engineer, and we began to taxi out

downwind at walking pace. I turned her in the strong, unpleasant wind, waved the boys away, and took her off. She was just like all the Austers that I had flown, lightly loaded and wallowing a bit in the wind turbulence, but light on the controls and easy to fly.

I did one circuit, and came in for a landing. In that strong wind I brought her in at fifty, and we came down a flight path that must have been close on forty-five degrees to the ground, moving forward slowly. I rounded off too high, gave her a little throttle and floated on till the far hedge looked about right on the windscreen, and then cut it as she rolled on to the grass. I did another circuit and another landing. The third time I brought her down on to the grass tail up at a very slow speed, and touched the wheels, moving forward only a few miles an hour. I throttled a little more, and we were motionless, flying at about a quarter throttle, tail well up. I held her on the ground like that for a few seconds; then a gust came and I jammed everything forward, and took off again.

I brought her round, landed just outside the hangar where the boys were waiting. I stopped the engine and got out of the cabin, and helped to push her into the hangar. It was too rough a day to leave her standing unattended on the tarmac. I got into the old Ford with Billy Monkhouse and we drove to the town.

When we got to the police station it was a few minutes after half past eight, and Hobart was speaking to Mrs. Hoskins. Dr. Turnbull was there, looking very sour. Mrs. Hoskins was saying, "Well, it's a lovely day here. The sun's shining. The wind's still strong, though. It looks rough out at sea, and it's breaking hard at the mouth of the river. I wouldn't want to see Don try it in the boat."

I crossed to the doctor and told him my plan to fly Dr. Parkinson in to help him. His face lightened. I knew he was thinking that in that case Parkinson would do the operation. He could spend an hour or two getting the patient ready, and then he would simply stand by to assist.

"That's a good idea," he said. "I know Parkinson. He's had experience with head injuries. He does a lot of this flying work. I don't say he's the best in Hobart, by a long chalk. But he's got a great deal more experience than I have."

The loud speaker was saying, "How are the patients, Mrs. Hoskins? Over."

"Betty's easier. Captain Pascoe seemed to be cold, so I filled the hot-water bottles about half an hour ago."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hoskins. I'm going to call Buxton now, but I want you to stay listening in case I want to speak to you again. 7 PC, this is 7 HT calling. Will you please come in. Over."

The sergeant touched the switch. "This is 7 PC answering 7 HT. Over to you."

"Thank you, Buxton. Is Captain Clarke there? Over."

I took the microphone. "This is Clarke speaking. Over."

"What's the weather like with you?"

"Quite clear over to the west, cloud to the east. Wind about thirty knots. What's it like with you? Over."

"We've got low cloud, ceiling about eight hundred feet, mountains covered. Wind two fifty degrees, twenty knots."

"Not much hope of getting through from your end?"

"Not from here. How is it with you?"

"I can make it," I said. "Dr. Turnbull is going to try and jump out as I fly slowly across the strip. He'll make it if anybody can. One thing, though. He would like help with the operation. Could you fly Dr. Parkinson up here?" I explained my plan.

"Hold on, Buxton." There was a pause while they consulted. I stood holding the microphone and looking out of the window. There was a hard brightness in the weather that didn't look too good. Hobart came on again. "That's okay, Captain Clarke. We're going to fly Dr. Parkinson up to you in the Proctor, leaving in about half an hour."

"Good," I said. "Have you got the latest Met report?"

"There's another depression coming up. They think it may clamp down about midday on the west coast."

I asked to speak to Mrs. Hoskins and they put her on. I told her that I hoped to have the doctor with her in about an hour and a half. I asked her to pick a soft spot of turf beside the airstrip and pin a sheet down on it with stones, so that we could see where to drop the doctor's suit-case.

Then we were ready to go. The doctor had a medium-sized fibre suit-case with him, heavily laden. He was wearing an overcoat, but underneath he was sensibly dressed in ski-ing trousers and ski-boots, with a roll-neck sweater.

We drove out to the airport with Monkhouse. I went to his desk and

laid out the course upon my map, marking it with a thick pencil line. It was about a hundred and fifteen miles, practically due south. It was going to take us all of an hour and a half to get there in that wind, and the machine had fuel for less than four hours. We wouldn't have much time for messing about. There were mountains up to four thousand feet along my route; I could dodge them by flying down the Arthur River to the coast but that would add another twenty-five miles. In this clear weather it would be better to go over them.

I put the map, with the airstrip-data sheet, in the map pocket of my old flying coat. Then I took the doctor to the aircraft. He sat with the suit-case on his knee and I strapped him in with the safety belt. I showed him what he had to do.

"When I give you the word, just open the door a little, like this, and hold the suit-case balanced on the edge. Then when I tell you, push it through and let go. I shall go up and we'll make another circuit then. While we're doing that, undo your belt and get out of your coat. I'll come down on to the strip and hold her there while you get out. You'll have to make it snappy, because I shan't be able to hold her there for long."

He licked his lips, and nodded. I was sorry for him. "You'll find it quite easy to get out," I said.

He unstrapped his belt, pushed the door open, lifted and turned his body, put his foot down on the metal step that hung below, and got out. "That's easy enough," he said bravely.

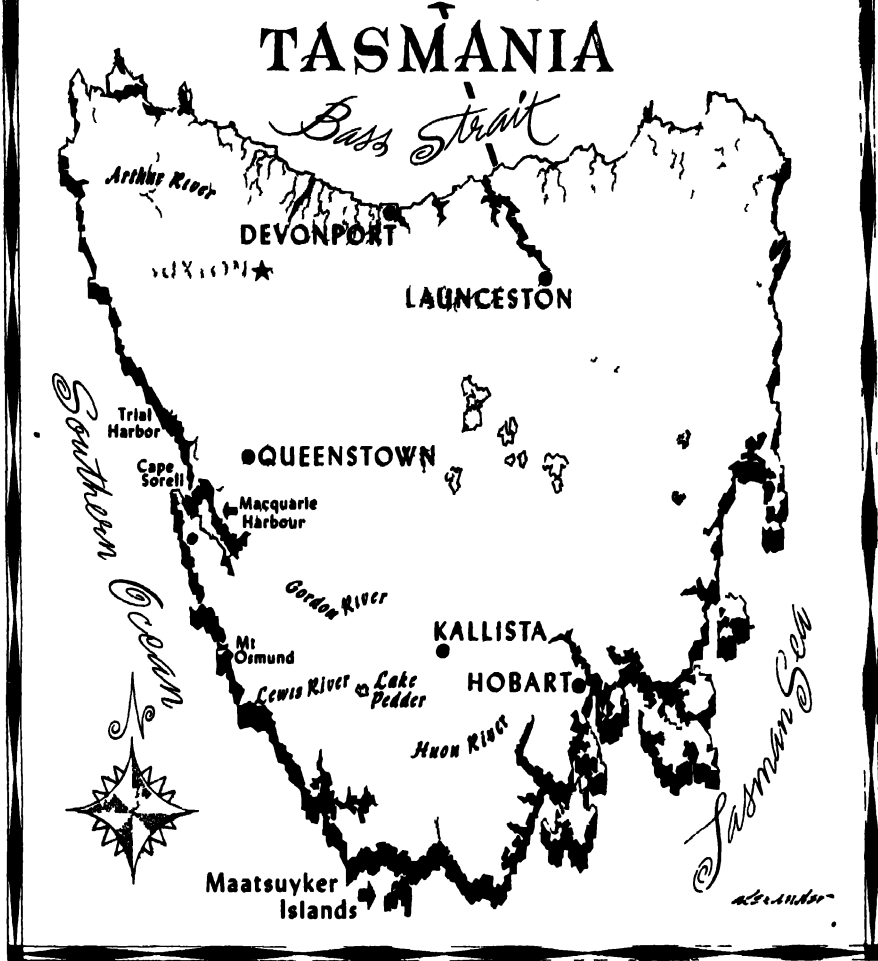
I nodded. "You won't have any difficulty."

He got back into the machine and I got in beside him, closed the door, and nodded to Monkhouse. While the two boys held the wing struts he swung the propeller for me and the engine caught; I let her run for a minute and then ran her up, trying the magnetos. Everything was in order.

In the air it was very bumpy, of course. The doctor sat gripping his suit-case, tense and anxious. I turned on course and held the machine on the climb. Not far away were the mountains we had to cross, snow-covered in the sunlight. To the east the cloud hung down upon them; to the west was sunlight and blue sky. I pulled out my map and set to work to identify the peaks, and the course that I must make good over the land. We had about fifteen degrees of drift.

280 Air miles - Melbourne, Australia

TASMANIA



The wild and beautiful island of Tasmania lies a hundred and forty miles south-east of Australia, of which it is a part. Somewhat smaller in area than Scotland, it is known as the most mountainous island in the world, with many peaks approaching five thousand feet. The climate is cool, resembling that of Ireland and southern England, and the island has become a favourite resort and retirement place. The population is about a quarter of a million.

Then I turned to the doctor. "Pretty, isn't it?" I said.

He looked round. "Awfully pretty. You know, this is the first time I've ever been up."

I was startled. I suppose I should have thought of that. On the airline, of course, it is common to go down the cabin and find passengers who have never flown before. I generally chat with them, let them talk a little, offer them a cup of coffee. With my mind set upon the need to get a doctor to the Lewis River, I had treated him pretty rough.

The thing to do now was to get him interested. "You've missed a lot," I said. "Do you sail a boat?"

"Yes," he replied. "We've got a sailing dinghy at home."

"This is just like sailing a boat," I said. I took his hand and put it on the stick beneath my own, and flew the machine like that for a time, so that he could get the feel, explaining the motions as I had so often done before on the first flight of a pupil. In a quarter of an hour he was doing it on his own, and seemed to have relaxed.

We had to go up to about five thousand to get over the hills, and it got bitterly cold. I had my leather coat and helmet and a muffler and even so I was cold, my hands blue. In his woollen overcoat the doctor must have been much colder. Over Macquarie Harbour I started to let down and it got warmer. We came to the coast and flew on southward at a thousand feet; it was still sunny but the sea was grey and rough, and we were crabbing along with a big drift.

I identified Mount Osmund, and began looking for the Lewis River. Several small rivers ran down from the mountains and we were uncertain which it was; they all looked equally impossible for a boat to enter. Then Turnbull saw the house.

It lay in the middle of an undulating moor, cut like a peat bog; there were one or two pools of water, tumble-down wooden structures, a few concrete tanks, and pipes. That would be the tin working. The house was a white wooden building, single story, with a little stream beside it and a kitchen garden. As we circled, a woman came out on the step and waved to us.

Then I saw the wreckage of the Auster Pascoe had flown in, and that led me to the airstrip. I dropped off height to have a good look at it. It was no better than the data sheet had told me, but I hadn't really believed that it could be so bad.

I went up again and circled round. There was a sheet on the ground, pinned down with stones, and as I circled closer I saw that the woman was putting up a wind-sock on a little flagstaff. It was a help, for there was nothing else to tell you the wind direction except the run of the seas. "I'm going to do a dummy run over that sheet," I told the doctor. "Don't put the suit-case out this time."

I brought her round and headed into wind, flying at fifty or sixty on the clock and throttling to lose height. It was turbulent, but not too bad; we passed fairly slowly over the sheet ten feet up and I knew that I could get her slower. I put on power and went round again, thinking that I should have to watch for the increased drag on the machine as he opened the door. "We'll put it out this time," I said. "Don't drop it till I say."

I took a longer run-up, to give him plenty of time. He got the door open a bit and seemed to have some trouble with it; it was hinged at the front side, and for the first time a doubt flitted through my mind. It seemed to require a good deal of pushing to get it open, and the effect on the machine was very noticeable. However, he got the suit-case down on to the sill and partly out, and then glanced at me and nodded.

I brought her in more slowly this time, and lower, flying at fifty minus. When we were fifty yards from the sheet and about four feet up I shouted, "Shove it out now!"

I had to keep my eyes on what I was doing, but I could sense that he was having the greatest difficulty in opening the door far enough to get the suit-case out. He was working in an awkward attitude, of course, sitting down and strapped in. We sailed over the sheet while he was still struggling and I went on as slowly as I could, four or five feet up. Finally he levered the door open with the suit-case and managed to drop it; it fell on the low scrub a hundred yards beyond the sheet. I shoved the throttle forward and went up again.

I turned to him. "I'm sorry about that door. I didn't think it would be so difficult at this low speed." I was very worried now. "I'm going to make another dummy run," I said. "I'll put her on the ground if I can, and hold her there for a few seconds. When I tell you, see if you can open that door wide enough to get out. But don't get out."

I brought her round again; the ground round the strip fell away most smoothly at the south end. Here the air turbulence would be least, and

I made my run-up on that. As I approached the strip that lay crossways before me I brought her in more and more slowly, flying by the feel of the drop of the tail behind me. Five feet, three feet, one foot up; we crossed the near edge of the strip and I put her on the ground, throttled a bit more and put the stick forward a little. We were motionless on the ground now, with the tail well up. I shouted, "All right, try that door!"

He lifted the catch and shoved it open. The blast of the slip stream was strong upon it, and to make things worse I had to open up the throttle to counter the increasing drag. I shot a glance at him as he struggled. With both hands he could only open the door a few inches. With a sick feeling in my throat I realized that he might not be able to get out of the cabin.

I shouted to him to shut the door, and took off again. When we were well up and circling, he said, "I could get out if it wasn't for the door. It's the wind holding it."

"It's the slip stream from the prop," I said.

"If you could stop the engine for a moment I could get out."

"I can't do that." I sat there weighing the position. There was a red lever at the door hinge for the purpose of jettisoning the door as an emergency exit. If I pulled that down the door would fall out and fly away, leaving a great empty space, but it would probably hit the tail, and we might both be killed. If I told him to do it while I held her on the ground it might fall away safely and he could get out. But after that I should have to take off with a big hole where the door had been. I had never heard of anyone flying an Auster like that, but it might be quite all right. I studied the fuselage. It was a little narrower at the front than at the rear. That meant, with the door removed, a great blast of air would come into the cabin, building up a pressure. I scrutinized the structure behind me. The main frame and the wings would probably be all right, but the big sheet of perspex that roofed the rear end of the cabin might go, and take with it the fabric covering of the rear fuselage. The cover of the fin might go, too. I did not think the machine would be unflyable, but it might be very much damaged. Anything that was going to happen would probably happen at a low altitude, just as I was taking off. That wouldn't be so good, for there would be no time to think, no time for a recovery of any control lost.

I went on circling. This was my fault, fairly and squarely. I was the one who was supposed to know about aeroplanes, and I had fallen down on the job. In all my years of flying I had had things happen, sufficient to warn me; but I had always had height, and luck, and perhaps skill, and I had got away with it. This time it would come at fifty feet or less, a great cracking noise behind me, followed by a jammed elevator or rudder, no landing possible ahead, no control, no time to try anything before we hit the ground, the engine came back into my lap, the fire broke out. Too bad on Sheila and my children, and I thought of what she had said: "Don't go and buy it yourself, Ronnie. . . ."

The doctor said after a moment, "It's sitting like this that makes it difficult to shove it open. I think if I was getting out and put my back-side against it I could squeeze through."

I glanced round, and now there was a new development. Over to the west I saw fresh cloud low down upon the sea at the horizon. I glanced at my watch; it was five minutes to eleven; before long we must be on our way home or we should be out of fuel. More bad weather was coming up; it would be overcast in an hour and probably low cloud and rain after that. There would be little prospect of a second trip today.

"All right," I said. "Let's try it. Undo your belt and take off your coat. But look, Alec. Be ready to hang on and get back into the machine if I tell you." It was the first time I had called him by his Christian name.

As I turned downwind I wondered if I dared throttle back on the ground for a few seconds while he got out. The wind-sock stood stiff and horizontal from the mast, and the air was very bumpy. The wind was still thirty miles an hour, about the stalling speed of the machine. If once I let the tail go down, the machine would lift in the wind and blow over backward. I put the thought out of my mind.

He was out of his coat now. I was asking a lot of this young doctor, though perhaps he didn't know it. I could quite easily kill him. Five feet—slower now—three feet—it was bumpier than ever. A little slower—one foot—and she was on the ground with the tail up. It was more turbulent than before; I could not hold her so for very long. I shouted, "Try it now!"

He screwed his body round. The seating side by side was very narrow and to get out backward he had to put his head pretty well in my lap;

my hand upon the throttle was in his way, and I dared not let that go. I raised my elbow high and he put his head under my arm, and pressed the door back with his body and put one leg out. As the door opened things were happening to the machine; I had to keep my eyes ahead, my left hand delicately on the stick, my right hand making tiny movements with the throttle in spite of his head under my arm jerking my elbow. This was getting very dangerous indeed.

He forced his body backward and opened the door farther, put his left leg down and found the step. The door was now more than a foot open and the effect on the machine was very bad. Elevator control seemed much reduced, she needed quite a bit of rudder, and I had to open up the throttle, making things still more difficult for him. All this I did instinctively, conscious only that this aeroplane was in a bad way. He forced the door still farther open with his backside, searching for the ground with his right foot.

Then the gust came. I saw it coming, blowing the rough herbage. I opened up the throttle a trifle, but I didn't dare to put her nose down farther for fear of hitting the propeller on the ground. I shot a glance at him, half out of the machine, and in that instant the gust came down on us, lifting the machine. By the time I got my eye back to the wind-screen we were five feet up.

There was only one thing to do: go off again. I gave her a little more throttle and put the nose down a little more. The doctor was still half out of the machine, his stomach on the door-sill, his left foot on the outside step. I said as quietly as I could, "Get back in, Alec."

CHAPTER 3

I FLEW on towards the sea, heading into the wind, at a low altitude, flying as slowly as I dared to make less pressure on the door. The machine handled like a pig, the door wedged open by his body. I hooked my right hand under his shoulder to help him, but the pressure of the air on the door was pinching his legs. I shot a glance forward, and then leaned across him and forced the door open with my right hand, freeing his legs. He managed to struggle back into the cabin and close the door; the control became normal again, and I put her into a slow climbing turn.

"You all right?" I asked, sweating.

"I'm all right. I could have got out easily but for this damn door."

A shadow passed across the machine and it grew suddenly cold. A cloud was crossing the sun. It was only a small cloud and the sun would be shining again in a minute, but others were coming up from the horizon, dark and menacing. In five minutes we must be on our way back to Buxton, or we wouldn't get there.

I circled, torn with indecision. I could land him if I jettisoned the door. I turned round again and looked at the perspex sheet, the fabric covering of the rear fuselage. It looked terribly frail, accustomed as I was to a large all-metal airliner. It would be dicey. With a heavy heart I came to my decision, wondering if this was cowardice or good sense. It certainly wouldn't help to have another crash. There comes a point, I thought, when cowardice merges with good sense. "This isn't any good," I said. "We'll have to go back."

"I'm quite ready to have another go," he replied.

He didn't realize that our lives had been balanced on a knife edge of danger. When I was a younger man I wouldn't have cared two hoots for that, but now I was forty-six years old. For many years as an airline captain I had avoided dangers; to do so was now second nature. The sort of flying I had been doing in the last twenty minutes cut clean across everything that I knew to be right. It was time to stop behaving like a crazy teenager.

I shook my head. "It's just not good enough. I'm sorry."

"I suppose there isn't any way of picking up that suit-case?" he inquired. "It's got all my instruments in it."

I said, "I'm afraid there's not," and set a course north for Buxton, angry and mortified. Cloud was forming over the mountain tops so that I had to deviate towards the coast, flying over the shoulders close beneath the cloud to make the distance as short as possible. Finally we came off the mountains, and the flat land to the north lay before us. The petrol gauge was jumping on the zero stop, which meant we had about two gallons left. I started to let down, found Buxton, and landed. The Proctor did not seem to have arrived from Hobart yet.

When I killed the engine we sat for a moment in the silence. "I'm sorry we couldn't make it," I said at last.

He said, "I'm sorry I was such a fool about the door."

"You were all right. It was too difficult for anyone."

Monkhouse came up to the machine. "No go?" he inquired.

I shook my head. "With the slip stream on the door the doctor couldn't get out."

"You didn't jettison the door?"

"I thought of that, but I didn't like to try it. Will these things fly without the door in place?"

"'Course they will," he said. "It's an airworthiness requirement. Anything that can be jettisoned, the aeroplane's got to fly safely without it. These fly all right without the door."

I got out of the machine and walked out on to the tarmac in silence. The sun had gone. It was overcast and grey and bleak, the cloud ceiling at about fifteen hundred feet, and descending. In the west it looked dark, with more rain coming. The wind was as it had been before. I went back into the hangar where the doctor was getting out of the machine. "Would you be willing to go out again, at once, and have another stab at it with the door off? You wouldn't fall out, you'd be strapped in with your safety belt. But I'm afraid it may be cold for you."

"I don't mind that. Now we've started this thing we'd better see it through."

I asked Monkhouse, "Is there anything to eat here? I've had no breakfast." I was hungry, cold and tired. I had been up all night, and I had done a lot of flying since I had slept last.

"There's my sandwiches for lunch," he said. "Over on the bench there, with a Thermos of coffee. I'll get some more when you've taken off."

I offered to share his lunch with the doctor, but he refused; the vicar's wife had given him breakfast. I stood by the bench eating mutton sandwiches and drinking coffee, thinking what an awful fool I was. I, the great airline captain, the self-acclaimed expert who had barged in to take charge of this affair. Even Billy Monkhouse, ground engineer in a pip-squeak show like this, had known the fundamental fact I had forgotten. Johnnie Pascoe would have had a doctor with him now but for my ignorance. But I could repair the damage I had done. If we got off at once, we could still beat the weather down to the Lewis River, though I might have a sticky time getting back.

It took about ten minutes to remove the door and fuel the aircraft. Then we got in again. I saw to the doctor's safety belt, for there was little else now to retain him in the cabin. "I feel a bit like the young man on the flying trapeze," he said.

"Quite happy?" I asked.

He nodded. "I'll be able to get out all right this time."

"Okay," I said. "Let's go."

It was bad in the air, very turbulent, the cloud ceiling down to about twelve hundred. With virtually no side to our cabin the grey wisps came right into the aircraft, and the map grew soggy in my hands. I had to deviate towards the coast much more than previously, and the cloud forced us lower and lower. By the time we got to Trial Harbour I was flying down the coast at about seven hundred feet in the increasing murk. It would be touch and go if we could get up to the tiny airstrip at the Lewis River.

I found the entrance to Macquarie Harbour, crossed it to the south shore and flew round Cape Sorrell, the top of which was in the cloud. I checked the time, and did a bit of navigation, working with one hand on the map upon my knee. It was another sixty-eight miles to the Lewis River, and we were making good about eighty-seven miles an hour over the ground. If we were doing ninety, I calculated, we would have forty-five minutes to go, but our speed was three per cent slower so call it forty-seven minutes. I pencilled the time on my map off Cape Sorell and the E.T.A. Lewis River, and went on, keeping the coast on my left.

Ten minutes later it began to rain, but there was a chance that the clouds might break when we got there. We went on down the coast with visibility less than a mile, and the cloud forced us lower till we were flying at about two hundred feet well out to sea, the coast just visible. It was a desolate coast fringed with black reefs; a heavy surf was breaking upon them, shooting up in places almost a hundred feet high. If our engine had packed up in that place our chances of survival would have been nil. The water ran off the windscreen on the doctor's side and blew into his lap. In ten minutes he was soaked. We went on, trying to identify each river mouth as we passed. The maps of the west coast of Tasmania, however, are very inaccurate because nobody lives there; we soon lost track of where we were.

When we were on our estimated time of arrival we had been flying for an hour and forty-three minutes. We should be a little faster going back, but the margin on our fuel was short and we had no more than ten minutes in which to find the strip and land the doctor. I approached the coast in the murk, well throttled back. It was featureless, fairly low, but the cloud ceiling was only about four hundred feet. There was no sign of any river mouth. I turned right and flew down along the coast, getting a bearing of its run; south of the Lewis River, I knew, it turned sharply east, but here it still ran towards the south. We were probably still to the north of the river, and I went on southward, one eye on my watch. Things were getting terribly tight for us.

It began to rain harder than ever, and the visibility grew worse. The cliffs got higher till their tops were in the cloud, then they dipped down, and there was a river entrance between black reefs boiling with surf. It didn't look like the entrance to the Lewis River as I had seen it before, but it probably was the same, seen from a different viewpoint.

I flew across the river entrance at a safe distance in case there was a headland sticking out in front of us, and then turned back and flew across it somewhat closer in. I pulled the little data sheet out of my pocket. It showed the river entrance. If it was the same one, the course to the airstrip would be about a hundred and ten degrees.

The cloud ceiling was now about three hundred feet. It might be a little higher over the land; there is usually a hundred feet or so of clear in weather like that. I turned and headed inland on a course of a hundred and ten degrees, climbing into the murk. I sat tense, ready for anything. We crossed the cliff and now button grass was close beneath my wheels. There was no clear air, or if there was I was not game to try and find it.

With my heart in my mouth I thrust the throttle hard forward, eased back on the stick, and climbed higher into the murk. I sat waiting for the crash till the altimeter showed seven hundred feet. Then I relaxed and put her in a slow turn to the right to find the sea again, flying blind between the hills. I said, "I'm afraid this is no good, Alec. I think we're right over the Lewis River, but we shan't be able to make it."

He said, "If there was a beach, I could get out on that."

"I haven't seen one," I replied. He didn't know what he was suggesting, although, as a Tasmanian, perhaps he did. If so, he was just



brave and that's all about it. We might be playing about over some other river, and if I put him out I should be leaving him stranded in uninhabited country in the worst weather with no provisions or equipment.

I started to let down towards the sea when I judged that it was safe, watching the altimeter. "I'm going back," I said. "We'll have to wait until this weather moderates."

We came out at about a hundred and fifty feet over a black, rough sea and started flying back northward. We were going a bit quicker, but I could only see a few hundred yards; I went on for ten minutes keeping the coast in sight.

Then it suddenly loomed up dead ahead of us; we were flying straight into a cliff. I flung the machine round in a violent turn to port, and we missed it by about a hundred feet. We were so close that I could see the mutton-birds on the rocks; I even fancied I could see their little eyes and claws. I steadied on a course westward out to sea, and pulled out the map. "That was Penguin Head," I said as calmly as I could.

If we went on following the coast like that we should be dead before we got to Buxton. We had practically no fuel for deviations, but they would have to be made. A course of three hundred and fifteen degrees for eighty-six minutes would keep us clear of danger and bring us near the mouth of the Arthur River, with a short run downwind, over low country, to Buxton. I explained the position to the doctor and then I started in to fly my compass course about a hundred feet up over the sea.

We were cold and miserable by the time I made my turn nearly an hour and a half later. In a few minutes we passed over the beach and went on across undulating country. The clouds were higher here and we could fly at about seven hundred feet, but now the gauge was jumping on the zero stop again. I decided to give it another five minutes, and glanced at my watch.

At four minutes we came to a white weatherboard farm-house. It stood in flat fields with a few trees round it as a windbreak. I could probably land here. I went into a turn and said to the doctor. "Do you know that place?"

"It looks like Jeff Duncan's property. They're patients of mine. They live about twelve miles from the airport."

"I'm going to put down there," I said.

There was a little plume of wood smoke from the kitchen chimney

which was a help, and a field of ten or fifteen acres downwind from the house; the trees round it would make a shelter for the aircraft on the ground. I dropped off height and turned low over it; there were some sheep there but the surface looked all right. I picked a clear patch between the sheep and brought her in and put her down, thankful to be out of the air. Some people came running out of the house as I taxied slowly forward to the shelter of the trees; the doctor got out and went to one wing strut, a young lad to the other, and we got her into shelter and tied her down to a harrow and a disk plough.

It was Jeff Duncan's farm, all right, and they all knew the doctor. He was soaked to the skin, and stiff with cold, and trembling. We all went into the kitchen and stood by the wood stove; they gave him dry clothes and hot whisky and lemon. I drank tea because there was more flying to do, and rang up Billy Monkhouse and asked him to bring over a jerrican of petrol. He told me that the Proctor had arrived from Hobart with Dr. Parkinson; he had gone to the police station to speak on the radio. I told Monkhouse to tell them that, again, I hadn't been able to land the doctor.

When I got back to the kitchen, the doctor said, "I'm sorry we couldn't manage it, Captain. What will we do now? Wait till it gets better and try again?"

I had very nearly killed him twice, at least, that day. "Do you want to try again?" I asked. "Dr. Parkinson's in Buxton."

He smiled. "He's had more experience. But I'd be quite willing to try again as far as the flying goes. I've got a sort of thing about this now. I want to see it through."

"So do I. I'll have to rest a bit, though, before going out again."

When Monkhouse arrived in his old car, I asked him, "Have you heard anything from the Met? Any more breaks coming?"

"Nothing in sight immediately," he said. "They've started a ground party to the Lewis River."

"I'll have to get a room at the hotel and get some sleep."

"Dr. Parkinson and his pilot took the last rooms in the hotel," Monkhouse said. "The best thing you can do is to go to Captain Pascoe's house."

As soon as the Auster was refuelled, the Duncans herded the ewes over to one side of the field and I got into the air and flew back to the

airport; the doctor was to go back with Monkhouse in his car. I landed just outside the hangar. Great gusts of rain were blowing across it, and I got out of the machine cold and unhappy. I rang up the police station and spoke to the sergeant. He said that the Met report was discouraging. Dr. Parkinson and his pilot, Phil Barnes, had gone for midday dinner at the hotel, with the lady.

"What lady?" I asked.

"A lady came just after you took off," he said. "A Mrs. Forbes. Something to do with Captain Pascoe, I think."

"Is she a relation?" I asked.

He said he didn't know. I rang off, and shortly afterwards Monkhouse drove up with the doctor. I said, "Can I get something to eat at the hotel?"

He glanced at his watch. "Dinner'll be off. Mrs. Lawrence'll fix you up something. She does for Captain Pascoe—lives next door. I'll take you there."

I got into his car with the doctor. He said that he would see Dr. Parkinson, which would save me going into town. I think he saw that I was just about all in. I fell asleep in the three or four minutes that it took us to drive from the hangar to Pascoe's house, on the edge of the little town.

We went and spoke to Mrs. Lawrence in the next house, a fat, comfortable woman. "I think he's got some bacon and eggs in the house," she said. "I could come over and do that, if it would be enough." I said anything would do. Then she said, "We're all so sorry about the captain."

"We'll get a doctor in to him as soon as this weather lifts."

She nodded. "I never knew it be so crook. You go on over and make yourself at home, and I'll be over in ten minutes. There's a fire laid in the sitting-room." She took a key from a nail over the sink and gave it to me. "That's the back-door key."

Monkhouse drove the doctor on to the town. I went into Johnnie's house. The door opened into the kitchen and I shut the rain out. The house seemed chilly and unlivid in. I went into the sitting-room, knelt before the fire, and lit it. With the fire's increasing glow, a little warmth began to creep into me, and presently I noticed that my coat was dripping on the fender. I stood up stiffly, took it off, and hung it on the

back of the kitchen door. Then I came back to the fire and looked round.

The room was a pilot's room, the walls covered with photographs of a long flying life. On the wall above the mantelpiece was a wooden propeller with queer, curved blades, hung as a trophy, like a pair of antlers. There were little bits of aeroplane all over the place, most of them old and unfamiliar to me. On one wall, among the photographs, there was a complete instrument panel, hanging like a picture; but the only instruments on it were a clumsy air-speed indicator, an antique aneroid, an oil-pressure gauge, a spirit cross and fore-and-aft levels. I wondered idly what sort of an aircraft that had come out of. But what I wanted was a bed, and I went out into the little corridor.

There were two bedrooms, one on each side. I opened the door on the left, and found myself in Johnnie Pascoe's bedroom. It was large and quite well furnished. I tried the other door. It would be better to use his spare room.

It was his spare room, all right, but it wasn't up to much. There was a bed with a mattress on it, but no bedclothes or pillows; a dressing-table but no chair. Dust lay thick. There was a strip of narrow carpet on the bare, unstained boards, and plain curtains joined by a few cobwebs shrouded the window.

I went back to his own bedroom. It looked comfortable, the bed made up neatly and covered with an eider-down. His razor, his hair brushes were on the dressing-table, his washing things on the basin by the gleaming taps. His dressing-gown hung behind the door, his slippers were under the bedside table, and the built-in wardrobe was full of his clothes.

Like the sitting-room, the walls of this room were covered with photographs and souvenirs, but what riveted my attention, what I needed, was the bed. Johnnie Pascoe wouldn't mind my sleeping there, I knew.

I put my haversack on the bed and then Mrs. Lawrence came in at the back door and began to organize a meal for me in the kitchen. I went back to the sitting-room and started to look round for a drink. In a corner cupboard I found a half-empty bottle of Scotch. I got a glass and some water from the kitchen. Glass in hand, standing by the fire, warm and comfortable for the first time that day, I had leisure to examine the room.

On the wall over the cupboard there was a photograph of a very

pretty blonde girl. It was inscribed across the corner in a round, flowing hand, "For Johnnie with oceans of love, from Judy." The ink had faded and the photograph had gone a bit yellow. There were other photographs with the girl in them, and many photographs of planes. They all seemed to have been taken at the time of the First War.

There was a very young man in the double-breasted "maternity" jacket of the Royal Flying Corps standing in front of a triplane—could that be Johnnie?

I moved over for a closer look. It was Johnnie, all right—no more than eighteen or nineteen. The wings on his chest had no ribbons beneath them. The triplane was a single-seater with a rotary engine and an open cockpit. I searched my memory for pictures I had seen—could that have been a Sopwith?

There was a very pleasant photograph of Johnnie and Judy in front of the rotary engine of some fighter. It was a small biplane. The portion of the undercarriage that was visible looked terribly flimsy, the tyre on the one wheel that was showing unbelievably small. He had his arm round her shoulders and they were laughing, both very young. The wings had two medal ribbons underneath them now. One ribbon seemed to be the Military Cross but I could not make out the other, nor could I identify the aeroplane. The wooden propeller behind them had a curved leading edge, and I turned and looked at the one over the mantelpiece. The boss, I saw, was stamped with a lot of letters and numbers and the word CLERGET. I wondered if it was the same as the one in that merry photograph, if Johnnie and Judy had once leaned against it, years ago.

I studied Judy's portrait, wondering if that had been the marriage that went wrong. It was a pretty face but rather a hard one. She was very young in the portrait, but it was quite possible, I thought, that by the age of thirty she might have developed into a real hard piece.

Mrs. Lawrence called me to the kitchen for bacon and eggs and fried potatoes; there was bread and cheese and jam, and a big pot of hot coffee. She said, "Just leave everything on the table when you've done. I'll come in again later."

"I can wash these few things up," I said.

"Captain Pascoe leaves them," she replied. "You'd better do the same."

She went away, and I sat down to my meal. It was about four o'clock, and the light was beginning to fade. I ate heartily, then got up from the table and went back to the sitting-room. The fire was burning well. I switched on the light and stood in the warm glow, thinking now of bed. Better give the meal time to settle, however, and I lit a cigarette. I crossed to the telephone, lifted the receiver, and put in a call to Sheila. I asked them to ring me back and tell me how long it would take to get through.

I put the instrument down, and raised my eyes to the wall above it. There was a photograph there, and after nearly thirty years my heart turned over because it was a photograph of Brenda Marshall as I had known and loved her from a distance when I was a boy of eighteen and she was nearly thirty. It was taken outside the hangar at Duffington airport, near Leacaster, where I learned to fly in the same year that that photograph must have been taken. She was standing beside her Moth in the white boiler suit she always flew in, smiling a little shyly at the camera. She had her white flying helmet in her hand, showing her short, curly hair. The corner of the hangar that showed just behind the Moth was the corner she had died in, on the stretcher. Hers was the first fatal crash that I had had to do with. I stood staring at the photograph, remembering her vivacity. Brenda Marshall . . . Johnnie Pascoe had taught her to fly, too.

A car splashed to a standstill in the rain outside the house. A woman got out of it and came to the front door. I cursed her inwardly because I wanted to go to bed, but there was nothing for it, and I went to the door.

"Captain Clarke?" she asked.

I said, "Yes." I did not invite her in.

"I came down to talk things over with you," she said. "I'm Marian Forbes." She was a woman about forty years of age.

I did not move from the door. "Is it anything urgent?" I inquired. "I got no sleep last night, and I'm just going to bed."

"You poor thing!" she exclaimed. "I know. I shan't keep you more than two minutes."

Reluctantly I let her in, and she pushed past me into the sitting-room. "What a lovely fire!" she said. "And what a cosy room!" She turned to me with a winsome air that might have been attractive twenty years

ago. "You know, there isn't anywhere to sit in that hotel, except the bedroom!"

"What can I do for you?" I asked.

She took off her raincoat, laid it on a chair and moved over to the fire.

"I just wanted to have a little talk."

"What about?"

"Oh dear," she said. "You *are* in a hurry to get rid of me, aren't you? And I've waited such a long time to see you."

The telephone rang, and I picked up the receiver. It was the exchange to say that there was a two hours' delay to Melbourne. I told them to cancel the call. There was now nothing but this woman to keep me from my bed. "Let's cut this short," I said rudely. "Who are you, anyway?"

She said, "I'm John Pascoe's daughter."

I stood silent a moment. "I'm sorry," I said. "I never knew he had a daughter."

"He's probably forgotten it himself," she said.

It didn't seem to be any concern of mine. "We're doing everything we can to get a doctor down to him," I said.

"That's what they told me. I suppose you've known him a long time?"

"He taught me to fly, back in England in 1911," I said. "I can't say I know him very well, but I've known him a long time."

"That's what they told me in the hotel." She paused, then she said, "I live in Adelaide." Later, I learned her husband was one of the leading surgeons there. "I told my husband when we heard it on the news last night that I'd have to come over and see that everything possible was being done. After all, he *is* my father."

"But you weren't very closely in touch with him?"

She laughed shortly. "Good lord, no! I don't suppose he knows I'm in Australia, or cares. He left my mother when I was two years old and after that we never heard a word from him."

It was nothing to do with me. "Everything that's possible is being done, Mrs. Forbes," I said. "An R.A.A.F. plane is on its way to Hobart with a parachute doctor and nurse, and a ground party has started out."

A gust of wind whistled round the house. "They tell me you're a married man," she said.

I was surprised. "That's right."

"Any children?"

"Two." I wondered what on earth she was getting at.

"I wouldn't want to see anything happen to a man like you," she said flatly. "Not for the sake of a man like Pascoe."

I didn't quite know what to say. I was evidently dealing with a very spiteful woman. I was even less inclined to let her stay there after that.

"Johnnie Pascoe's all right," I said. "In any case, I can look after myself."

"I know a lot more about him than you do," she retorted. "He's an out-and-out rotter. I don't want to see anybody taking risks over a man like that."

"I thought you said that you had come to help him."

"That's right," she said. "If there's anything needs doing—nursing home or surgeon's fees or an allowance till he's fit to earn his living again—I've got a duty to him, I suppose. Apart from that, I don't want to have anything to do with him."

"Well, you may as well go back to Adelaide right away," I said curtly. "He seems to have plenty of money for anything he needs, and he's got friends who'll look after him."

"You don't like me much, do you?" she said.

"Lady," I replied, "I've been up all night and you're keeping me out of my bed. I'll be in a better frame of mind to talk to you tomorrow, if there's anything to talk about."

She paused, and then she said, "I had lunch in the hotel with Dr. Parkinson and his pilot, Mr. Barnes. Dr. Turnbull came in and he was telling them about the two flights that you made today."

"What about them?"

"When Dr. Turnbull told them what you'd done, they were horrified at the risks that you'd been taking. Dr. Parkinson says he doesn't want to fly to the Lewis River with you."

I was very angry. "I never heard such nonsense. At a time like this things have to be stretched a bit."

She picked up her raincoat and bag. "I don't know anything about flying," she said. "I only know what people who do know were saying in the hotel. They think you're crazy. I think that, too, because Johnnie Pascoe simply isn't worth it. That's what I came to say."

She moved towards the door. I didn't like her spite against her father, but there might have been a twisted element of kindness to me and to my family in her visit. My eye fell on a picture on the wall behind her. "Was your mother's name Judy?" I inquired.

"Judy Lester," she said. "That was her stage name. You must remember her."

"She was a bit before my time. I've heard the name."

"Her real name was Lichter," she said, "but she didn't use that on the stage." She squinted at the photograph. "That's my mother," she said. "I've got a copy of that photograph somewhere."

I stood there thinking what a fool I was to have interested her in the pictures. Her eye wandered to the one of Johnnie and Judy in front of the biplane fighter. She indicated the laughing boy in the Royal Flying Corps jacket. "Is that him?"

"That's Johnnie Pascoe," I said.

"I was only two when he deserted us," she said. "I don't remember him. We lived in Los Angeles. Ma went there for the films, and when her contract ended she kept a rooming house. That was after she divorced my stepfather." She indicated Johnnie Pascoe in the photograph. "*He* lived in England."

"You've never met him at all?"

"I flew by AusCan once from Vancouver to Sydney," she said. "He was the pilot from Honolulu to Nandi in Fiji."

"Did you make yourself known to him?" I asked.

"I wouldn't demean myself," she said.

I made another effort to unstick her so that I could go to bed. "Well, there it is," I said. "He's kept those photos forty years."

Her lips curled a little. "Evidence of a conquest." She glanced round the room. "He's got another to keep her company. Evidence of another conquest, I suppose."

She was looking at the photograph of Brenda Marshall, standing by the Moth in her white overalls. I disliked this woman very much, her cynicism, her whole way of looking at things. "He's over sixty years old," I said. "If he likes to keep photographs of women who've been kind to him, that's nothing to do with us. I'll have to ask you to go away now."

She flushed angrily. "All right, I'll leave you to sleep. When you

wake up you'd better go back to the mainland. I don't suppose any of the doctors here will want to fly with you."

I showed her out, and poured myself another whisky from Johnnie Pascoe's bottle. I sat down in his chair before the fire. I lit a cigarette to cool off. I knew I wouldn't sleep if I went to bed as angry as I was.

That was a bad, spiteful woman, and I mustn't let her get under my skin. To tell a pilot of my age and experience that his flying was unsafe, that doctors didn't want to fly with him—that was a shrewd one, the stab of a woman in the habit of hurting. The worst of it was that it was very nearly true. I had stretched things to the limit of safety that morning, and perhaps a little beyond. Surely one had a right to do that when a man's life depended on it? And if I was prepared to take a chance, surely I had a right to make the doctor take it with me? He hadn't seemed to mind. . . . But in spite of my efforts I had lost the doctor's suit-case and achieved nothing, nothing at all.

To take my mind off my troubles I got up and set the barometer, and then went on looking at the pictures. There were other photographs of Johnnie Pascoe in the First World War. There was a group of about a dozen pilots standing in a meadow, probably on the edge of an airport, because a quaint, old-fashioned Nissen hut with a boarded end showed in the background. All the men were very young. Three of them wore the R.F.C. tunic, double-breasted; one wore a single-breasted khaki tunic buttoned close up round the neck and on his chest the upswept wings of the American Army Air Corps. Scrawled on the bottom of the photograph were the words "St. Omer" in white ink that had faded to yellow. Johnnie Pascoe was standing on the right. He had something round his neck that flopped down in a light streak on one shoulder. It looked for all the world like a silk stocking.

There was a very good photograph of a rotary-engined biplane fighter, in flight. It was a very small machine, to judge by the size of the pilot's head, with a single pair of struts between the wings. I guessed it to be a Sopwith Camel. It had two machine guns mounted on the top cowling. The pilot's head was turned towards the camera and it might have been Johnnie Pascoe.

So many photographs of the First War, all framed and hung in a group upon one wall! All dated from before my earliest flying days, but they brought back memories of that first enthusiasm that has lasted from

my boyhood, of slow-revving engines, of castor oil sweeping in blue clouds over the grass, of taut doped fabric drumming beneath one's fingers, of the rush of air over one's head beyond the leather of the flying helmet, of carefully judged gliding turns on the approach, of the final sideslip in over the hedge, of soft landings upon grass. So many joys that lay behind me, a part of my youth.

They had been part of Johnnie Pascoe's youth, even more than mine. He must have learned to fly in 1916 or thereabouts, when flying had been the greatest adventure the world had to offer, an adventure that led almost certainly to death.

In the First World War the casualties in training pilots had been staggering, because the aeroplanes were cheap and easily made, the pilots were needed in a hurry, and nobody understood much about training. When they were sent to France there was no relief for a pilot after a fixed number of missions. He went on flying two or even three missions on every fine day till he was killed or seriously wounded.

That had been the pattern of Johnnie Pascoe's youth—the greatest adventure in the world leading to death willingly accepted. That had been the pattern of his life when that laughing photograph with Judy had been taken. Everything that he had done in his youth must be related to that pattern. I could just get an inkling of it, because I had entered the same world fourteen years later. Marian Forbes would never have a clue, not if she lived to be a hundred.

Whatever had happened between Johnnie Pascoe and Judy had happened very soon after the First War. It must have meant enormous readjustments in his mind when the war ended. When the promise of death, willingly accepted, was withdrawn—what had there been to take its place? Johnnie Pascoe had gone on flying.

Marian Forbes had ceased to worry me. I threw the butt of my cigarette in the fire and stood there, looking at the photos. *That*, the single-seater with the top wing of the biplane sprouting from the fuselage at the pilot's seat, must have been a Sopwith Dolphin. *That*, with the backward stagger, might have been a DH-5. How he had loved those days of early youth, to keep so many photographs!

I went through into his bedroom. Mrs. Lawrence had turned down the bed; there was a pair of clean pyjamas. Johnnie Pascoe was providing everything for me. I threw off my clothes and got into his pyjamas,

cleaned my teeth at his wash-basin and got into his bed. I put out his bedside light and settled down to sleep, tired after thirty-six hours on the go.

Outside, the wind was high and the rain beat against the small, exposed house and drummed on the corrugated-iron roof. I would ring Sheila when I woke. She wouldn't be worrying because it was only five o'clock.

We must get help to Johnnie Pascoe. I didn't know how long a man with a fractured skull could live without attention, but no more than a day or two. I should have asked the doctor, yet it would not have made any difference to events.

I was very near to sleep, in Johnnie Pascoe's bed and on his pillow. If he were to die, at any rate he would know we were doing everything we could to help him, for he would come back to this small house, if a man goes anywhere beyond his death.

This was his home, the only home he had, the shrine that held the treasured relics of his life. Somewhere in this bedroom with me would be . . . would be the Military Cross, in one of the drawers of his chest, perhaps. Somewhere there might be souvenirs of Judy . . . a silk stocking he had worn round his neck when flying, in the First World War, forty years ago. . . .

CHAPTER 4

T*hose rotary engines . . . the Le Rhones, the Monos, and the Clergets! They made a sort of crackling hiss, and always the same smell of castor oil spraying backward in a fine mist over your leather helmet and your coat. They were delightful to fly, the controls so light, the engines so smooth-running. . . .*

Up among the sunlit cumulus under the blue sky I could loop and roll and spin my Camel with the pressure of two fingers on the stick. Looping, turn off the petrol just before the bottom of the dive, ease the stick gently back and over you go. The engine dies at the top of the loop; ease the stick fully back and turn the petrol on again as the ground appears so that the engine comes to life five or six seconds later.

She would climb at nearly a thousand feet a minute, my new Clerget Camel; she would do a hundred and ten miles an hour. She would be

faster, I thought, than anything on the Western Front. There was the airfield, turn off the petrol and put her into a volplane. Volplane turns downwind from the hedge, S turns keeping the field in view. A turn to the left in the bright sun, keeping the hedge in sight. A turn to the right. Now, turn in, a little high, stick over and top rudder, the air squirting in upon you sideways round the windscreen. Straighten out, over the hedge, and down on to the grass at over forty miles an hour. Watch it. . . . Lovely.

I came to rest on the grass in the bright sunshine; for an April day it was terrific, right out of the box. I turned the petrol half on, set the mixture, and taxied in to the tarmac. Donk was there with a lot of other people, girls, some of them. I jumped out of the cockpit and told the mechanics to wipe the plane down and then to drench out each cylinder with paraffin.

Donk and Bose and Jerry came up with the girls. Bose said, "Meet the Hounslow Wonder. Flies upside down a darn sight better than right side up. Flies backward, too——"

Donk said, "Don't listen to him. He's not got over last night."

"I wasn't," said one of the girls. She turned to me. "You were just wonderful."

"Don't tell him that," said Jerry. "Now he'll go and drop it. Remember Butch?"

"He didn't drop it," I said. "One wing came off. Introduce me."

Donk said, "This is Daisy, and this is Lily, and this is Judy. This is Johnnie Pascoe. He's as mad as holes."

Judy was in uniform, a WAAC, and she was lovely. Even in the two-tone drab buttoned up to the neck she made the others look like two pennyworth. My face and hands were oily. I turned to her. "I'd like to shake hands, but I'd make you a mess," I said. "You doing anything tonight?"

She laughed up at me, and it was perfect. "Yes."

"Then put him off and have dinner with me at the Savoy."

She laughed again, and shook her head.

Donk said, "She's the little French girl in *Picardy Princess*."

I turned to her again. "You're not Judy Lester?"

She nodded, laughing.

I touched the sleeve of her uniform, and started walking on air. "But

what's this in aid of?"

"I drive General Cadell in the mornings," she said.

"Nevertheless," I said, "will you have dinner with me?"

"I can't. I'm on in the first act."

"Will you have supper with me after the show?"

"All right. But I go home at midnight."

"You won't tonight," I said. "What do you like to eat best?"

"Smoked salmon and ice-cream."

"*Tournedos* in between?"

She nodded, and then she clasped her hands together, bent a knee, put on a woebegone air, and said, "Oh sir—I am but a simple village maid. I know not what you intend by these fine gifts, so far above my station in life."

I blinked at her, and the others burst into a roar of laughter. Donk said, "You'll know before the evening's out."

"Can I pick you up at the stage door?" I said.



"All right. Ten past eleven." She smiled and my heart turned over. "Is this your new aeroplane?"

I nodded. "I only got it yesterday. It's a beauty. A hundred and thirty horsepower."

She came with me and I showed her the engine, dripping a little oil and making sizzling noises. "We're forming up a new squadron now," I told her. "I'm to lead one of the flights."

"Captain Boswell was saying that you shot down seven Germans."

"The eighth shot *me* down, but I got down behind our lines."

She glanced at the one gold stripe on my sleeve. "Have you ever crashed?"

"Six times," I said. "The seventh is the lucky one. Do you drink champagne?"

She said, "Kind sir, I know not what to say—Jiminy! Here's the General coming. I'll have to go."

I saw all the high brass coming, but they were the length of the hangar away. By side-stepping we could get behind the fuselage. "Come this way," I said. "I want to give you a kiss."

She laughed. "Not much. You'll mess up my uniform. Besides, I don't know you."

She ran to the dark green Crossley parked by the hangar and swung the starting handle. When the General came up she was standing stiffly to attention. She saluted and opened the rear door for him, while we stood laughing. Then she went round to the driver's seat and got in, let the clutch in too hard, and stalled the engine. The others were laughing fit to burst, but I ran over and grabbed the starting handle and swung it. She gave me a lovely smile and got away with a jerk and a grinding of gears.

That afternoon I got my flight together for a dog-fight. For the first ten minutes Donk and Jerry and Tim Collins, a New Zealander, were to set on me and try and get me in their sights, and then I'd pull out while Jerry and Tim set on Donk, and I watched. I wanted Tim to have a good work-out because he'd only just come down to us from the School of Aerial Fighting at Ayr.

The first ten minutes went all right and then I pulled out at about ten thousand and Donk started in. He had them all tied up; over and over again they got behind him but when they went to line up on him he

just wasn't there. I suppose they got mad or something because they both came in at the same moment, Tim only looking ahead and Jerry diving in on the same line, with Tim in the blind spot underneath him. Jerry's wheels took Tim's top plane clean away and the rest of the wings collapsed, and there was just a heap of wreckage in the air, and Tim going down in the bare fuselage, and Jerry flying round without any wheels.

Tim went into some greenhouses near Hanworth and made a hole four feet deep, and Donk and I shepherded Jerry back to Hounslow where he made a belly landing in the middle of the field and stepped out of it unhurt. But he was shaken up and talking a lot of nonsense, so I put him into my machine and sent him up to practise aerobatics, telling him I'd have his hide if he bent it, while I went off to see the C.O. We fixed the funeral for Friday and I said I'd write to Tim's folks in New Zealand and see about a wreath from the squadron.

I waited till Jerry got down in my Camel, with a bottle of egg-nog in each pocket of my overcoat, and we had a drink in the hangar. Then Donk and Bose came along and we had another, and by that time things didn't look so bad. We all went into Town by tube and got out at Piccadilly. We got a beautiful wreath for Timmy at the florist's, and then I got a bright idea, and I bought a bouquet, a really nice one, carnations and things done up with silver paper, to hand up across the footlights.

They hadn't any seats for *Picardy Princess* that night, but they did have a box, so I took that. I might have filled it up with the others but I didn't; I just said I'd see them at the Savoy afterwards, and sneaked out to the theatre alone. She spotted me, and sang her two songs straight at me, so that the audience began to turn and look at me, and laugh about us, because they could see I was in the Flying Corps and that I'd got the M.C. and the *Croix de Guerre*. After the grand finale when the attendant took my bouquet up and handed it to her across the footlights she blew a kiss at me. I stood up in the box and blew one back at her, and that brought the house down. Then I was round at the stage door waiting for her.

She came hurrying out and insisted on giving me a carnation from the bouquet, but my "maternity" jacket hadn't a buttonhole to put it in so she tucked it into the strap of my Sam Browne.

The crowd were all at the Savoy when we got there, and they chipped

us about having tarried on the way, which we hadn't—much. I took Judy in my arms for the first time as we danced together, and we liked it, and did it again and again. Then, before we'd hardly begun to get to know each other, the band was playing "God Save the King," because it was two o'clock. I got Judy into a taxi and took her to the flat in St. John's Wood that she shared with another girl, and we kissed each other all the way, and the drive wasn't nearly long enough.

I was writing to Timmy's mother next morning, and saying what a terrible loss he was to the squadron, when Donk came in with the news that Chuck Patterson was killed. Chuck was flying in a Bristol fighter in the gunner's cockpit and they had a forced landing. He was thrown out and, when he came to, the machine was burning and the pilot in it, trapped. So Chuck went in to try and get him out, and then the petrol tank exploded. He and I were in the same year at McGill together doing first-year Engineering, and we joined up on the same day.

Judy. Flowers, lots and lots of them. Funerals, and firing parties. Dancing with Judy, and the softness of her breasts against my uniform. The whispers in her ear as we danced. The fun of that early summer, and the laughter, and the deaths.

Judy. The day we had together down at Henley in a punt, when we changed into bathing things among the bushes and went swimming, and I took one of her stockings so she had to take the other off and go back to London without any stockings on.

Dancing with Judy. "If you were the only girl in the world . . ."

Sandy McPhail diving on the target in Staines Reservoir just ahead of me when the C.C. gear failed and shot off one blade of his propeller. The engine falling out of the machine, the Camel fluttering down in weaves and spins into the water with the two machine guns running wild and spraying the whole countryside with bullets. Sandy swimming ashore fit as a flea with nothing to show for it but a cut lip and a bruised eyebrow, and the colossal binge at which we presented him with a medal for saving life—his own.

Judy. The investiture at Buckingham Palace, with Judy watching from the gallery. The Sailor King in naval uniform, the little pointed beard close to my face as he pinned on the silver cross, the firm handshake.

Judy. The day we got our orders to go to France in ten days' time, the

day I picked up Judy at ten past eleven at the stage door and walked her out under the trees of Leicester Square, and took her in my arms and asked her to marry me.

Judy. The special marriage licence. The flowers at the wedding, the old slipper, the confetti at the railway carriage. The hotel at Maidenhead, the calm summer evening, and, next morning, the breakfast tray in bed with the sun streaming in on us. The familiar hiss and crackle of a flock of Clerget Camels that brought us hopping out of bed and out on the veranda as the squadron peeled off one by one. Jerry doing a full roll below the level of our window, Donk running his wheels along the river so that they made two light furrows on the water for a hundred yards and set the moored punts rocking. Bose going through the telephone line and taking away a length of it streaming from his undercarriage. The startled onlookers, and Judy waving at them in her nightie in the sun

Judy, back in the show that evening, and the whole squadron in the stalls and Judy ad-libbing at them across the footlights, the laughter and the fun. The four of them that set on me during the grand finale and shoved me on to the stage beside her, the glare of the footlights, the orchestra switching to the Wedding March, the laughter and cheers from the audience. The impromptu supper on the stage with the cast and the squadron, the champagne, the toasts.

The quiet of the night drive through the moonlit streets of London in an open taxi to the flat in Kensington that I had for the next four days alone, with Judy.

Judy. The hectic rush to get the squadron fit for operations in the next three days. The new pilot posted to us, a pink-and-white boy called Phil Thomas with only twenty-six hours' solo flying, only twelve on Camels. The row I had with the C.O., because it would be just like murder out in France. The secret worry and the strain.

Judy. The early breakfast on the last morning, the last kisses, the promises to write. The parade on the tarmac with all the machines lined up, the speech from the General. Taking off for Lympne to refuel before the Channel crossing, the major in front and the three flights behind him, each in a V formation, the turn on course beneath the low grey clouds, the excitement and the pain of leaving.

The sea crossing, with Calvert turning back when we were five miles

out because his engine quit, and going down into the sea with no boat near, a couple of miles off shore. Hodson cracking up in landing at Gravelines. The new hut for a mess, the air raid the first night, the letter to Judy.

Judy, who now seemed far away.

The first patrol across the lines, leading my new flight. The three Fokkers two thousand feet below, the dive in to attack with our six Camels, the hideous surprise when they just put their noses up and climbed away from us till they were on top and in the sun and diving down on us. These new D-7's can certainly outfly our Clerget Camels. The dog-fight and the turning, covering Phil Thomas and trying to work our way back to our own side of the lines. The infinite relief when the Fokkers climbed away from us and made for home, probably short of fuel.

The working out of new tactics with the major. Bose bringing back his first patrol with Roger missing. Bose telling us the Fokkers were at twenty thousand feet, a good five thousand feet higher than we can get. The knowledge that we've got to make up with our better piloting.

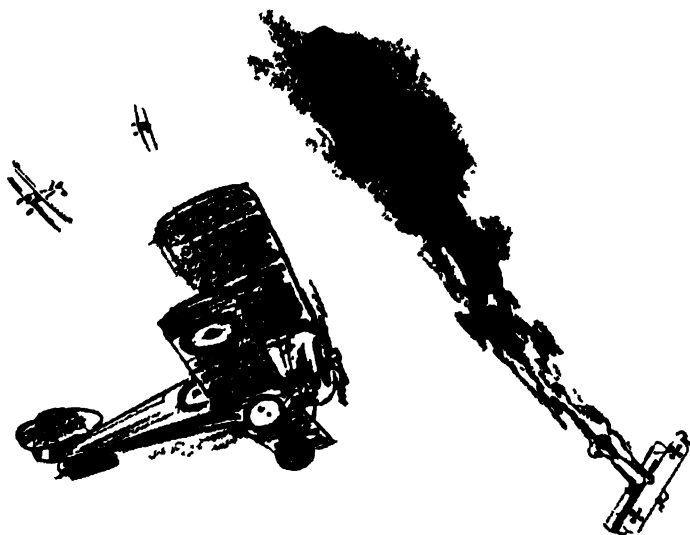
Writing to Judy, telling her about the piano we got for the mess to play her songs on.

Phil Thomas dead. Sam Cooper missing. Waiting for a letter from Judy. She hasn't written yet.

Writing to Phil's mother, writing to Sam's wife. She's having a baby. Writing to Judy about the wild flowers here.

Bose missing, and turning up again. The ground machine guns got him going home from a patrol at about five hundred feet. The engine went on fire so he stopped it, and got out on to the wing. He found he could volplane it by reaching in to grab the stick among the flames although his hand got burnt. He tried to land it but went into a hedge and got thrown out. He was lucky. He'll be in hospital a week or two, and Peters has his flight.

Jim Peters killed, his first patrol as flight commander. A Rumpler got him. Those high-flying two-seaters are murder because you have to fight them up at fifteen thousand feet where we have no performance. It takes three Camels to tackle a Rumpler at that height. The rumour that we may be going to get Dolphins. Donk's Camel like a colander. He says he's getting ulcers.



The arrival of four pilots, all under twenty, one of them, Peter Stanley, with only thirty-one hours' solo.

A letter from Judy! She says everything's very dull, and I never tell her anything about the war. She's not sure, but she thinks she's going to have a baby. Writing her to say that's marvellous.

Peter Stanley killed on his first patrol. A Fokker for me, which makes nine. Drinks in the mess. Writing to Peter's mother.

Getting the woofits now, because I don't sleep so good. Bose back and flying with his hand in bandages—they tried to send him home but he won't go. The little Irish girl that he got tangled up with at the hospital. That's bad luck, because it takes your mind off flying and you can't have that when you're on Camels in this year of grace.

Pancaking my Camel coming in to land after a patrol. The third Camel that I've used up. Hoping that we'll come to the end of them, and get on Dolphins. Jim Sanders killed. I got another Fokker which makes ten. But still not sleeping.

Reading the English newspapers. "The Fokkers saw a flight of Camels coming down on them, so they turned and raced for home." Pasting it up on the wall by the bar. Good for a belly laugh.

Bose missing, believed killed. He had his flight out on patrol and jumped a solitary Pfalz, but it was there as a decoy and about ten

Fokkers came down out of the sun. Writing to Bose's wife. He was a schoolmaster, and had two kids. Every time I get to sleep I wake up with a jerk, and then I can't sleep again until I've had a drink. Going to the hospital to tell the little nurse. Think she'll be consolable.

Going out alone before dawn and sneaking across the lines, hedge-hopping. Found a Jerry airport with a Rumpler taking off. Took it head-on at about five hundred feet, then put a burst in its belly and went underneath. Saw it crash in flames. Eleven. Ground fire very bad and lucky to get back for breakfast. Trying to write to Judy, but my hand was shaking so I gave it up.

The squadron getting five Fokkers in one day, and losing the major and Tom Foreman. Five must be pretty near a record. Cy Hampton to be our new C.O. Of the nineteen of us who flew to France two months ago there's only Donk and Jim Curtis left, and me. Cy thinks they'll send us back to England to get re-equipped with Dolphins. If so I'd see Judy. I've only had one letter.

Lying awake from midnight until half past three and then going out in the moonlight with a bottle of gin to try and get another Rumpler. Waiting till the first streaks of light showed down on the horizon, watching the Handley Pages coming back from some night raid. The take-off down the field in the half-light.

The ground fire. Machine guns everywhere, spitting flame at me. God, this is bad. Gunners everywhere. Hit several times, and smoke coming from the engine, heading west now towards our lines. Engine dying—only seven hundred revs. Hit again in the tail, can hardly keep her in the air. Wham—my leg. Engine stopped, prop stationary, this is it.

Switches off, petrol off, down into this field. Pancake down, under-carriage collapses. Tip on the nose and crack my head on the guns, then she falls back right side up. Blood streaming down my face, blood in my flying boot and down my leg. The grey-clad, running soldiers in the grey dawn.

The stretcher bearers helping me out, the first-aid station in a farm stable. The three German pilots giving me cigarettes and asking questions I mustn't answer. If they can learn anything that's any good to them by looking at a Clerget Camel they're welcome.

The hospital at Ghent, the German nurses, the messages through Switzerland to Judy and to Mother back in Hamilton, Ontario. The long

journey to the prison camp near Hanover. The weary months. The weary months. The letter from Judy, telling me the baby would be born in February. The cold, the weary days, the prison camp.

The Armistice, the cheering and rejoicing, the sullen German officers, the train to the Dutch frontier town, the sea crossing to England. The small house in Golders Green where Judy was living with her mother.

Judy. Judy, pale and irritable and out of work. Her mother hard and hostile, pointing out that I was out of work, too. Judy refusing to come up to Town or to be seen anywhere until the baby arrived. Judy refusing to come back to Canada with me for my demobilization because of her career in London. Judy refusing to come away with me for a short holiday. Judy crying and in a temper.

The crossing on the overcrowded ship to Halifax, the demobilization in Ottawa. Arriving home at Hamilton, the crowded platform at the depot, the reporters, the photographers. Mother, and Sis, and home, so little and so very much the same. The demands that I should tell them all about it, all about Judy.

Judy The great weariness of home, with nothing to do. The desolating sense of being out of place. The thoughtless, untouched people. The boredom. The ship back to Liverpool, third class. The journey up to London, the small cheap hotel. Judy, irritable and waiting for the baby, evasive when I said I'd have a flat for her to come to from the nursing home. Judy full of plans for a new show as soon as her figure was back to normal.

Judy. The desperate search for a job, with all the other ex-officers. The visits to the airports at Hounslow and Croydon, putting one's name down—"We'll let you know." The job in Great Portland Street selling second-hand cars on commission. The insurance agency. The tyre-recapping job.

Judy, in the nursing home, better-tempered, thankful it was over, preparing to park the baby girl with her mother till she could afford a nurse for it. The baby, red and wrinkled. Judy full of plans for a new show. Judy dressed to kill, looking younger and more attractive than ever, wanting to lunch at the Savoy so that she could be seen, and offering to pay. Judy with a leading part in *Lucky Lady*, seventy pounds a week and her name in lights. Judy moving with her mother to a flat in Hampstead.

The job by the seaside, taking people joy riding; three pounds a week and twenty per cent of the takings after expenses. The joy of the chance to get flying again. Judy offering me seven pounds a week as her publicity manager. The quarrel.

Judy The Avro with its blipping engine, purchased for scrap price. The one ground engineer and the one boy. The tent beside it, the frying-pan meals. The placards with my picture on them, the dare-devil ace, the eleven victories, the Military Cross. The one visit from Judy, half an hour, her lips curled a little.

Judy, with a Hollywood contract, leaving for America, with her mother and the baby and the nurse. The stilted good-bye at Waterloo station, the sense of being out of place in the theatrical crowd to see her off.

The film of *Lucky Lady*. The letter from the lawyer at Reno, Nevada, telling me that Judy Pascoe (Lichter) was suing for divorce citing desertion, asking if I intended to contest the suit. *Judy* : ' . . .

CHAPTER 5

I WOKE in the darkness in the little wind-swept house beside the airport in Tasmania. My face and Johnnie Pascoe's pillow were wet with tears. In the ordinary way I never have bad dreams or any dreams at all; I had not cried since I was a boy. I was ashamed of myself, and struck by the grim idea that this was a manifestation of fatigue. When the fatigues of flying start to bear too heavily, it shows at the next medical examination. Bad dreams and crying were probably a warning.

I got out of bed and went into the other room. It was about nine o'clock. The fire was still glowing in Johnnie Pascoe's hearth; the wind was still high, but the rain seemed to have stopped. I put in a call to my home.

They told me that the call would be through in a few minutes, so I went back to the bedroom, and put on Johnnie Pascoe's dressing-gown. There were cigarettes and matches in the pocket. I lit a cigarette and stood before the fire, waiting for the call. I glanced at the photograph of Judy. She had become very real to me. I knew the way she turned her head, the feel of her against me. I could have picked out her voice among a hundred others on a gramophone record.

My imagination had been running wild in my dreams, and that was not a good thing. When a pilot gets to a certain age, he should live a very regular life in order to go on flying for a long time, as Johnnie Pascoe had. I had departed from regularity in the last day or two, and I had received a warning.

The telephone rang, and there was Sheila. "Evening, dear," I said. "I just rang to say it's okay over here. How are things with you?"

She said they were all fine, and I told her about my two trips with the doctor. "How is Johnnie Pascoe now?" she asked.

"I haven't heard for the last few hours. I've been asleep. I'm going to ring the police station in a minute."

"Don't go and take *too* many risks, Ronnie."

"I won't do that." We had been married for twelve years, and I knew what she was thinking. One day Ronnie Clarke might be in the same boat, and want help from a pilot.

"When do you think you'll be able to ring me again?"

"I'm hoping to be home tomorrow night. If I can't make it, I'll ring you in the evening."

"All right, dear," she said. "Good luck."

"My love to the kids," I said. "And you." I rang off. Then I rang the police station. The sergeant answered. "Captain Clarke here," I said. "What's the latest on the weather?"

"Well, the wind's dropping. They don't think there'll be any more rain for the time being. Continuing low cloud tomorrow. There might be a break tomorrow evening."

"What about Captain Pascoe?"

"He's worse. Deteriorating, you might say."

"Where's Dr. Parkinson?"

"He's at the hotel, with his pilot. If I may say so, Dr. Turnbull is the one you want."

"Why? Dr. Parkinson flew up here to do this job. Doesn't he want to fly with me?"

The sergeant laughed awkwardly. "That's about the strength of it, I'm afraid. But Dr. Turnbull, he's roaring to go. He's got a nurse, too."

I thought quickly. The Auster would seat three people, though it would be less easy to handle in extreme conditions. "Where did he get a nurse?"

"Friend of Captain Pascoe, works at the Alexandra Hospital in Melbourne. She's a young woman, under thirty, I'd say. Sister Dawson."

I thought for a minute. "Look, Sergeant," I said at last. "I want to go to the Lewis River at dawn if the weather's fit, taking the doctor and this nurse. The doctor has a telephone, hasn't he?"

"That's right. The number is two-six."

"How can I get hold of Mr. Monkhouse?"

"He has no phone. I could send a message."

"Tell him I want the Auster refuelled and ready to take off at six o'clock in the morning. I'll take off in the dark and get down to the Lewis River about dawn. Tell him I shall want a few paraffin flares out at the airport for the take-off."

The sergeant said, "I'll take that message over myself."

"Thanks a lot. If you're speaking to Hobart again, see if they can get me a Met report, and tell them to warn Mrs. Hoskins I'll be down. Since Dr. Parkinson doesn't want to fly with me, we'll have to take turns with this Auster. Tell Phil Barnes we'll be back by breakfast time if we can't make it. He can have the Auster then and have another stab at it with Dr. Parkinson, while we're resting. We'll take it in turns all day tomorrow."

"Real tactful, I would say," the sergeant said. "If I don't see you before you go, sir, the very best of luck."

I rang two-six, and got the doctor. "It's going to be a bit early in the morning," I told him, "and it's going to be a bit dicey in the dark. But it's getting urgent now."

"I think it is," he said. "It sounds like sepsis to me."

"Could you do anything for that?" I asked.

"I could lift some of the damaged bone," he said. "That's quite a normal procedure."

"About this nurse," I said. "She'll have to get out in the same way that you do. I'll land you first and cruise round while she changes into your seat, and then come in again and put her out. Do you think she could do that?"

"I think she could. She's quite ready to try it. I can borrow a pair of ski-ing trousers for her."

"Get her ski-boots, too—something to support the ankle. Tell me, how did you get hold of her?"

"She just turned up to see if she could help. She worked for a year as an air hostess for AusCan. She met Captain Pascoe then. Then she went back to the hospital."

"Well, she couldn't have turned up at a better time."

"I'm having a bit of trouble finding somewhere for her to sleep to-night," he said. "The hotel's full. Have you got a spare bed in Captain Pascoe's house?"

"There *is* a bed, but no bedclothes and no pillows, and it's all a bit dusty. She's welcome to that."

"Be all right if I bring her down in about an hour?"

"That'll be all right. I'm sleeping in Johnnie Pascoe's room, on the left as you go into the passage from the living-room. She'll be in the room on the right. The thing is—it's rather important that I should be on the top line tomorrow morning and I want to get a good night's sleep. I'm going to take a Nembutal. When you come in, try not to make a noise. I'm setting an alarm for five o'clock."

I rang off. I was wakeful and thirsty, and I went through to the kitchen and came back to the living-room with a glass of cold milk and a couple of biscuits.

Cold milk. Cold milk at a party. What bell did that ring in the distant past? Something to do with flying, certainly.

And then it all came flooding back, the inquest that the coroner, my father, had held on Brenda Marshall after she died in the hangar of the club. Me sitting in the body of the court and Johnnie Pascoe in the witness-box, and Dad asking him questions about the accident, and writing down his answers in longhand so that the inquiry stretched out, painful and interminable. "Have you any reason to suppose that the deceased had taken any alcoholic liquor before she went up on this flight?"

And Johnnie Pascoe answering, "No, sir. As a general rule, she never drank anything but cold milk in the club-house. Sometimes in the evening she would have a drink, but I never saw her do that before flying. I shouldn't think that alcohol had anything to do with it." Johnnie Pascoe, the pilot instructor, bronzed and athletic, very grave.

Brenda Marshall.

I crossed the room and stood looking at the photograph again. It must have been taken in 1930 or 1931, about the time that I learned to fly.

I remembered the Moth behind her in the photograph. She had it painted white, and because the registration letters were G-EMLF she called it Morgan le Fay after the enchantress, King Arthur's sister.

Johnnie Pascoe had taught her to fly in 1930. Brenda Marshall, with her short, curly hair, her shy, friendly smile, her white flying suit, her Moth. Brenda Marshall, who was kind to everyone, who made a home for her sister's baby when her sister had to go to India with her husband. Brenda Marshall, of Duffington Manor, who had had bad luck with her husband, and lived alone in the big house with her mother till her sister wished the baby on her. Brenda Marshall, the first woman I was ever in love with, though I was eighteen and she was nearly thirty. Everybody in the Duffington Club had been in love with her, including Johnnie Pascoe. But nobody knew that but me, I think.

I blew a long cloud of smoke as I stood looking at the photograph. At the time of the inquest it seemed to me that Dad had been stupid. Before the inquest I had tried to make him understand something about aeroplanes, with the superior knowledge of five hours' solo to my credit. I had said to him that the accident needed a good deal of investigation; she had got into a spin at six or seven hundred feet right over the middle of the airport and that sort of thing just didn't happen to an experienced pilot like Brenda Marshall.

Dad refused to listen to me. He said that aeroplanes were dangerous for women pilots, that she must have fainted. He had asked the standard questions about the airworthiness certificate of her Moth and about Brenda's licence and her general state of health. Doctor Haughton had given him an account of her multiple injuries, and had told us that the cause of death was shock.

By that time the inquest had lasted for an hour and a half. Dad shuffled his papers together and announced that he found that the deceased had met her death by accidental causes in a flying accident. He expressed the sympathy of the court with the dead woman's mother and her husband, who was shortly to come out of hospital. With that he closed the court, and at home he refused to discuss the case with me.

Soon after that Johnnie Pascoe left Duffington to take a job with Imperial Airways in India. Brenda's mother went away and took the baby with her but it died a short time later, someone told me. Within six months Derek Marshall, her husband, who had had shell-shock in

the war and had been in and out of hospital ever since, got himself involved in a particularly unpleasant case of rape and blew his head off with a shot-gun.

It was years before it occurred to me that possibly Dad hadn't been so stupid after all. But he was dead by that time, and I never had a chance to verify my hunch.

The milk was beginning to work, I was feeling more relaxed. I went into the bedroom, glass in hand, and found the little bottle of hypnotic pills in my haversack, and swallowed one down. I went back to stand by the fire and finish my glass of milk.

Johnnie Pascoe, I thought, must know much more about Brenda Marshall than I did because I had seen him kissing her one evening in the hangar, behind a Blackburn Bluebird. It was the evening she came back to Duffington from France. She had been in France for the winter, and her Moth had been down at Heston for a Certificate of Airworthiness. She had stopped in London on her way home, and had picked it up and flown it home.

When she came back to Duffington that April afternoon, I was in the air with Johnnie Pascoe doing dual. He saw her first, a little speck in the south-east just above the horizon, and we flew to meet her, and turned and flew alongside in formation, waving at her as she waved back to us. We watched her landing and then landed ourselves and taxied in behind her.

I hung about till dusk examining her Moth after we had pushed it into the hangar, because it had a Sperry automatic pilot fitted at the overhaul and I wanted to ask how you used it. But they were too busy to have time for me. It hurt a bit to see him kissing her, but they both looked so happy I was glad for them, and after all her husband had been in the loony-bin for years.

I stood there by the fire-place wondering, as I had wondered for the last two years since chatting with him in the pilots' room at Sydney airport, whether the baby had been his, the one that died. When I was eighteen it never entered my head.

Presently I went back sleepily into his bedroom, threw off his dressing-gown, and got back into his bed. I was drowsy now. The time was about twenty minutes to ten, and I set his alarm clock for five o'clock. With any luck I could get to sleep before the doctor brought the nurse into

the house, and I settled down on his pillows with his bedclothes round my shoulders.

Twenty-eight years later, for Johnnie Pascoe, the wheel had come round full circle, for he was again a pilot instructor at a little flying club, teaching young men and women how to fly an Auster or a Tiger Moth. Successive waves of sleep were passing over me and sinking me into forgetfulness of present things, and as I went I wondered if he had ever had another pupil like Brenda Marshall. . . .

CHAPTER 6

B*renda Marshall lived with her mother in the big house at the entrance to the village, and she drove an Alvis sports saloon. In a way she owned the airfield because it had been requisitioned in the war from one of her husband's farms, and the Air Ministry were still leasing it. . . .*

For a year after I arrived in Duffington I saw nothing of her. I lived at the hotel, the Seven Swans, and I was busy working up the flying club, and getting most of the enterprising young men and women of Leicester as members. I knew who she was by sight, but it was a surprise to me when her Alvis drew up outside the hangar one bleak morning in January and she got out. I went out of the office to meet her.

"It's Captain Pascoe, isn't it?" she asked.

I smiled. "That's right."

She said; "I'm Mrs. Marshall."

"I know. I'm very glad to meet you."

She said, "I felt I must come down here and see what's going on. After all, we're such near neighbours."

The January wind whistled round us. "I'd like to show you everything there is to see," I said. "Would you come into the office? There's a coke stove in there. We've got a fire-place in the club-room, but we light the fire only at week-ends when people come out. Things go a bit flat in the winter in a flying club, you know—although the hours are keeping up quite well. We did a hundred and five hours in December."

"That's splendid," she said vaguely. I showed her to the office. She threw back her fur coat. She was bareheaded, and short reddish-brown curls were massed all over her head. She was pale, and I thought she did not look well.

"Have you a lot of members?" she said.

"We've got two hundred and ten flying members," I told her, "and three hundred associate members. Would you like a cup of tea? We usually have one about this time." I went out and asked the ground engineer to slip over to the club-house for another cup, with a saucer, unusual in the hangar. Then I went back and found my visitor standing in the doorway looking at the aircraft. "They're so much bigger when you see them close up," she observed.

"These two are Moths," I told her. "That's a Bluebird."

She looked into the cockpit of the nearest Moth. "All these clocks mean something, I suppose. . . ."

"That's the most important one," I said. "Tells you how fast you're going. Have you ever flown?"

"Just for ten minutes, about two years ago," she said. "A man was here giving joy rides."

"Would you like to go up again?" I asked. "I can take you up any time. We charge two pounds ten an hour."

She brightened. "Could you do that?"

"That's what we're here for. We could go up this morning, if you like, but you might enjoy it more when it's sunny."

She looked out of the hangar door; it had begun to rain a little. "It's a bit piggy now," she said "I'd like to go when you can see something."

I laughed. "Quite frankly, Mrs. Marshall, so would I. Creeping along in the rain just above the tree tops trying to find one's way by recognizing the cows isn't really my idea of fun. There's a change forecast for this evening, though. We might get a fine day tomorrow."

We went back into the office for our tea. "Esmé Haughton's a member of this club, isn't she?" she asked.

I nodded. "She's been doing quite a bit of dual."

"She was telling me about it last night. She said that everybody has such fun down here. . . ."

"We get quite a crowd at week-ends," I said. "Everybody's fairly young. Still, I've got the Lord Mayor and the Chief Constable, Colonel Chance."

"Colonel Chance is awfully old to learn to fly, isn't he?"

"It's not difficult, so long as you've got good eyesight."

"Could you teach me to fly?"

"Of course, Mrs. Marshall. Would you like to learn?"

Her eyes sparkled. "It would be marvellous! But I thought I'd be too old."

I smiled. "You must be under thirty, surely."

She nodded.

"Your eyesight's all right, isn't it? Your heart's all right? It doesn't *look* as if there's anything the matter with you."

She laughed. "I think I'm quite all right."

"You'd probably get a lot of fun out of the club," I told her. "It costs three guineas to join it."

She put down her cup. "That's really what I came here to do. I didn't mean to learn to fly at all."

"I know," I said. "One thing leads to another."

In the hangar I showed her the footholds on a plane fuselage and helped her into the back cockpit. The ground engineer and I swung the Moth round to face the rain-swept airport and lifted its tail up into flying attitude on a trestle to make the look and feel of the machine realistic for her. When she was settled down and comfortable I started to show her the controls. I found that she was rather above the average of women pupils in her comprehension of things mechanical. She was used to driving a fast car and interested in it, and she readily grasped the starting-up procedure and learned the idea of the main controls: that seemed to me enough for one day.

It was sunny and cold next morning, with not much wind. I fitted her up with a helmet and headphones, lent her my leather coat and goggles, put her into the back cockpit and strapped her in. Then I got into the front seat and explained to her over the headphones what I was doing in the pre-flight checks before we taxied out to the far hedge, and got into the air.

She wanted to see Duffington Manor from the air so we did a circuit over that, and then went up to a thousand feet for her to learn to fly straight and level. She got on all right, and at the end of half an hour I took over the control and told her we were going in to land. She was to rest her hands and feet lightly on the controls and watch what I did.

She said, "Before we land, do you think we could loop the loop?"

I was surprised. "We'll get a little bit more height, first." As we

climbed I made her check her safety belt. Then with her hands and feet resting loose on the controls I dived the thing a bit and sailed it over in a loop, telling her what I was doing all the time, cutting the engine when the ground came down from the ceiling. When we were flying level again I twisted round to look at her, and she was flushed and smiling. "That was marvellous!" she said. "I felt everything you did."

"I didn't feel *you*." I learned then that she had a very gentle touch, very sensitive hands. "Keep them on the controls while we land."

I brought the Moth in, taxied into the hangar and stopped the engine. When I had helped her out of the machine, she said, "I don't know when I enjoyed anything so much." She was laughing and bright-eyed. "Can I have another lesson tomorrow?"

"Sure," I said. "If you're going to learn to fly, it's a good thing to do it every day."

"How long would it take me before I could go solo?"

I thought for a moment as we walked towards the office. Women usually take longer than men, but she had very good hands. Navigation would probably be a weakness. "Most people take ten or twelve hours dual," I said. "Twenty or twenty-five lessons."

"Three weeks," she said. "Then one day, you just get out of the front seat and tell me I can go alone?"

I laughed. "That's right."

We went into the office and I sent the boy for tea, and she took off my coat and helmet and ran a comb through her short, curly hair. She was full of questions about the machine and her instruction. Then the tea came, and she took a cigarette from me.

"Tell me, Captain Pascoe—are you English?" she asked.

"I'm a Canadian. I came to England in 1915 to join the R.F.C., and I've hardly been home since. I've grown into things here. I'd feel like a fish out of water back home now."

"I've never been out of England," she said. "It must be fun to travel."

I was surprised, for she was evidently well off. "You've never been to France?"

She shook her head. A shaft of January sunlight came in weakly through the office window and made a golden aureole round her. "What you taught me today wasn't very difficult," she said. "Will it be more difficult when I get further on?"

"It's like everything else—don't try and learn too much all at once. Don't bother about that loop, for example—I'll teach you that later. Just concentrate on what you've done, and next time we'll do a little bit more."

She finished her tea, and made an appointment for next morning. As she was leaving, she said, "I'm not dressed right, Captain Pascoe. A skirt isn't convenient. Would it be better if I wore a pair of trousers?"

That was a very daring suggestion, and I was surprised. "Well—yes, it would," I said. "It might make you a bit conspicuous, though."

"I could change here, in the ladies' room."

"I think I'd go the whole hog and wear overalls, a boiler suit," I said. "It would protect your clothes."

She got into the Alvis and drove off, bright and excited, and looking very pretty. That afternoon it was sunny, and Colonel Chance came out for a lesson. I had him up for half an hour, and when he landed we stood smoking outside the hangar for a few minutes. "I got a new member yesterday," I told him. "Mrs. Marshall."

He smiled. "How did she do?"

"All right. She might make a good pilot."

He stood thoughtful behind bushy grey eyebrows and short, clipped grey moustache. "I should think she might. She drives that car too fast, but she drives quite well. Pity about her husband. He's in The Haven, you know."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I didn't know." The Haven was a very expensive home for mental cases, on the outskirts of Leicester.

"He got shell-shock in the war," he said. "When they were married everybody thought he was cured, but then he got a relapse. He's been in and out of The Haven ever since." He paused, and then he said, "Of course, it wasn't the shell-shock. There was a weakness there before."

"Is he in there permanently?" I asked.

"I think so. He's certified insane, anyway." He drew on his cigarette. "She's had a time with him."

I was grateful to him for telling me. It's better to know the scandal about members, and then one can avoid saying the wrong thing. I think that was why he told me. "They must be pretty well off," I said.

"Wool spinners," he replied. "They've got a big mill in Halifax. His brothers run the business."

"Who's the old lady—Mrs. Duclos, that lives at the Manor?"

"That's her mother. She came to live there after Marshall was certified."

"Are there any children?"

He shot a glance at me. "No. I suppose they had more sense."

A few days later, when Brenda Marshall came for her third lesson, she had a brown-paper parcel in her hand.

I smiled. "You got a boiler suit?"

"I got three of them," she said, "and a white flying helmet. Look." She undid her parcel on the bonnet of the car and spread her purchases out, childlike, for my approval.

I turned the helmet over in my hands. "That's all right," I said. "I've got a spare pair of headphones we can put in this."

"I got a pair of goggles, too, like yours," she said. "And this leather waistcoat to go underneath."

I smiled again. "You must have spent a lot of money."

"I had a lot of fun. Shall I put them on?"

I nodded. "I'll get the machine pushed out while you're changing, and fit a pair of headphones in the helmet for you."

When she came across the tarmac to the machine she was dazzling in white, boyish with her short, curly hair. She put on her white helmet and I adjusted the headphones; with the strap done up beneath her chin the white fabric framed her face giving her, queerly, the appearance of a nun.

I did up the strap of the boiler suit behind her back, and then said casually, "You look like a million dollars. We'll try a turn or two today."

When we were in the air I gave her the machine to hold on a straight climb. When we got up to a thousand feet and she was flying straight and level I found she was doing it quite well. Over the gasworks and the railway station the air was a bit bumpy, but her corrections were quick and accurate. I turned the machine and set her to fly back through the bumpy bit for practice, and then I started in to show her Rate One turns.

By the time her half-hour was up I was reflecting that I'd have a job to spin out her instruction for twelve hours, the time I give a woman pupil as a minimum.

When we landed I told her, "You were doing those turns nicely, Mrs.

Marshall. But you were slipping outward just a bit on one or two of them. Try and think of your behind when you're in a turn. You shouldn't feel you're slipping either way on the seat cushion."

"Isn't that what the little bubble is supposed to tell you?"

"Don't think about the bubble. Think of your behind. I'll tell you about the bubble later. The only instrument you want to use at present is the air-speed indicator."

She nodded. "I do like flying in this boiler suit. My skirt was always blowing up before. You don't think the suit looks conspicuous?"

"It looks swell," I told her. "It *is* conspicuous, but it's practical. I think you'll set a fashion for the other women."

When she came to the club on Saturday there was a crowd and I was surprised to find how few members knew her. She came in shyly, as a stranger. I introduced her to Peter Woodhouse, the honorary secretary. When darkness came and I landed with the last pupil, I went into the bar for a bottle of beer and found Peter there.

"She thaws out after a bit," he said. "At first I thought that she was snooty, but I'm not sure that she isn't just shy. I'd never met her, though I've seen that wizard car sometimes. If I had that I wouldn't wash it. I'd lick the dirt off it."

"She lives a very retired sort of a life," I told him. "The vicar says she was a concert pianist before she married."

"I suppose her shyness is natural," he said, "after that hoo-ha with her husband. They had him in court."

"What for?"

"Little girls. After that they put him in the bug-house."

"See if you can introduce her to a few people," I suggested. "I don't like to see her here knowing nobody, and having tea alone."

He took up my suggestion. I dashed into the club-house for a quick cup of tea the next afternoon and saw her having tea with Ronnie Clarke. Ronnie was mad on flying. He was only seventeen and still at school. He spent all his spare time at the airport, going up as a passenger whenever he got the chance, but his father wouldn't let him learn to fly till he was eighteen. Ronnie was a pleasant sort of boy.

We got a spell of bad weather after that. Frequently I had to ring up in the morning and cancel her lesson. Once she said, "Could you fly in this? Safely, I mean?"

"Oh yes. It's just that it's too rough for instruction."

"Could you take me up, just so that I can feel what you do in rough weather, resting my hands and feet on the controls?"

So I took her up and flew her round a bit, battling with the Moth and using full aileron now and then. At the end of twenty minutes I asked her if she would like to try it straight and level by herself, and she did it fairly well. After that she never let me cancel a lesson unless I could assure her that I wouldn't fly myself. We flew in mist and rain, groping our way round the countryside at a few hundred feet.

She went solo early in March. She had been ready for a week or two, but I kept her doing landings and little cross-country trips till we got the perfect day. Then one morning it was bright and sunny, with a northerly wind and a rising barometer. We did two landings, then I said, "Like to try it alone?"

She nodded. I got down on to the ground and stood beside her. "Take your time," I said. "Do a circuit or two at a thousand feet till you feel comfortable, and then bring her into land. If your gliding turns don't come out just the way you want them, put on engine and go round again. If you feel quite comfortable after the first landing, do another one. If you're not quite happy, bring her in and we'll do a bit more together. Okay?"

She nodded. "Don't get heart failure."

I grinned at her. "I shan't do that." I walked towards the hangar, not looking back because it fusses a pupil when he sees the instructor looking at him. It was not until I heard the engine open up that I turned to watch her rather wobbly take-off.

She climbed till she was at about seven hundred feet, then levelled off and did a wide turn to the left. She flew back over the airfield and did a couple of steeper turns, and by that time I knew that she was gaining confidence. Then she went over downwind and commenced the gliding turns that would bring her close up to the hedge. She came in rather high but touched down about the middle of the airfield, bounced two or three times, and came to rest. I signalled to her to go on and do another.

When she taxied the machine into the hangar she was flushed and excited. She pulled her helmet off. "It was marvellous. The first one was a rotten landing, I'm afraid."

"The second one was better. You came in a bit high on the first one. Did that upset you?"

"Yes, it did. I wasn't sure if I ought to go round again."

"That'll all come right with practice," I said.

She turned to me and said seriously, "I don't know how to say what I'm feeling, Captain Pascoe. But I do want to thank you for all you've done in teaching me. I felt so *safe*."

"I'm glad of that. It's what I'm here for, after all."

"If I come out this afternoon, could I have another go?"

"Of course," I said. "It would be a very good thing."

She came at three o'clock. "Don't stay up longer than half an hour," I said. "Do four or five landings, but don't get out of sight of the airfield."

I watched her from the office window as I had a cup of tea. The ground engineer came in. "Doing all right," he remarked. "Pleased as a dog with two tails, she is."

When she came in, I strolled out to meet her.

"I feel that I could take her anywhere," she said.

"Well, you can't. We'll have to do some navigation if you're going to go places."

She said, "I feel we ought to celebrate, or something."

"I'll open up the bar and we can have a drink."

She said, "Oh, do let's do that! I'll go over and change."

When she joined me I was behind the bar. "What are you going to have?" I asked. "This one is on the club. You get one free drink for going solo."

"I'd like a gin and French. What will you have?"

"I'd like a beer," I replied. I pulled the barman's stool up, and we sat down with the bar between us.

She sipped her drink, and I lit a cigarette for her. "I tried to tell you this morning what all this has meant to me. It's like stepping out into another world, a much wider world, where one could hurt oneself or even kill oneself. But you've made it all so *safe*. I'd never have dreamed three months ago that I should ever fly an aeroplane. I'd have thought I'd never have the nerve. You've showed me how to step out into the wider world. That's why I'm so terribly grateful to you."

"I've just been doing my job," I said.

"If we did some navigation and cross-country flights together, I could fly to France, and Italy, couldn't I?"

"Amy Johnson's just flown to Australia," I said. "I'd like to see you with fifty hours' solo before you fly abroad."

"Is it difficult to own an aeroplane?"

"Not more than a car, or not much more. You could have a Moth and keep it here."

"How much would a Moth cost?"

"A new one costs about seven hundred and fifty pounds—depending on the equipment. You could get a good second-hand one for about five hundred. It costs about three hundred a year to run."

"If I wanted to buy one, would you help me buy it?"

"Of course I would."

She stared into her glass. "I must be going crazy. . . . Not on one gin and French, either. Intoxicated with going solo. To talk of buying my own aeroplane . . ."

"If you've got the money, it's not a bad thing to do. Get you out into that wider world that you were talking about."

"I've got the money," she said. "As for the wider world, I'm not sure I'm not in it now. Up till the time I joined this club I'd done nothing that I want to remember, except music. Now, I just want to remember every minute of every day. Have you got great bits of your life you never want to think about? Somebody once told me that everybody has."

It was a new idea to me, and I thought before replying. "Yes, I think I have. The last year of the war and the year after that."

"Was that when you were shot down and taken prisoner?"

"It wasn't that. I got married, and it wasn't a success."

"I'm sorry," she said. "It's rotten when that happens. Are you still married?"

"To tell you the truth, I don't know. She divorced me for desertion, in America. I don't think that's valid in England." And I went on to tell her all about Judy.

"I'm very sorry," she said quietly when I finished. "Women can be terribly silly, sometimes."

"Not only women," I said. "So can men."

"I suppose so. All fools, all the lot of us." She finished her drink, and left. It was a long time since I had been able to talk to anyone like that.

CHAPTER 7

WHEN BRENDA came again I let her do a little more solo, and then started to teach her something about aerobatics. She wasn't much interested after the first excitement, and she said that flick rolls made her feel sick. I kept her at it, however, because they would accustom her to getting her machine out of any attitude it might get bumped into.

Then I started to teach her navigation. She wasn't greatly interested at first; to her it was a lot of tedious sums that seemed unnecessary when you had roads and railway lines to follow. So one day I told her to fly me up to Leeds for lunch at the Yorkshire Club, and to work out the course.

She put on the correction for variation the wrong way and she forgot about the wind. When we'd been flying for about an hour and a quarter a big town showed up ahead of us with a very large river in front of it. She said down the speaking-tube, "Is that Leeds, Captain Pascoe?"

"You tell me," I said. "I'm just the passenger."

"That river's not shown on the map."

"I can't help that," I said. "I want my lunch."

She flew on to the city, and there were docks and trawlers and ocean-going ships. Presently she said in a small voice, "Captain Pascoe, I think this must be Hull."

"You take me to Leeds," I said. "You've got about an hour and three-quarters' fuel left."

She began to fly north-west. Presently she said, "It's thirty-five miles to Sherburn, so that'll take us twenty-six minutes, but I can't remember about the variation. Do I take it off or add it on?"

"Add it on to get the magnetic course," I said. "What are you doing about wind?"

"I'm not doing anything. I can see the smoke from a train and it's just about straight ahead of us."

"Sure we're going to get there in twenty-six minutes, then?"

"Oh"

She found the airport in the end and made quite a smooth landing. We taxied in and she said, "I'm terribly sorry for being so stupid. I got

muddled—the noise of the engine, and the wind, and nothing to write on.”

“You want to work it all out before you start and put a nice thick line on the map.”

“I put the nice thick line, but the ground wasn’t the same as on the map.”

“Come into the club-house, and bring the map and your ruler. I’ll show you what you did wrong.”

In the club I offered her a soft drink. She said, “Do you think they’d have any milk?”

I got her a glass of very cold milk, and over that we held the post-mortem. Then she worked out the course to take us home, and got it right.

Over lunch she said, “I’ve been thinking some more about having a machine of my own.”

“Airwork usually have a few second-hand Moths. Would you like me to find out what’s available?”

Her eyes danced. “Come on. Let’s go back now and phone them.”

I laughed. “I haven’t finished my cheese.”

“You don’t want your cheese. It’ll make you fat.”

She dragged me away from my lunch, and flew back to Leicester, straight as a die. When I got through to Airwork a salesman told me that they had a Moth with a Cirrus Mark II engine, which would suit her; it was in the shop for its C. of A. inspection. By my elbow she said urgently, “Ask him if I can have it painted white with red registration letters and a red leather seat.”

I did so. “He says it’ll cost you a bit more.”

“I don’t mind that. When could we go down and see it?”

I thought for a moment. “Monday?”

“But that’s your day off!”

“Give you a bit more cross-country practice,” I said.

We flew down to Heston on Monday morning. The Moth was all dismantled in the workshops, and it looked a bit of a shambles to her, but it gave me a chance to have a look at the structure. I told her it was a good buy, and the salesman showed her one that they had just reconditioned, all new-looking and shiny, and she was as pleased as Punch. The salesman took me aside and told me that he had reserved two and a half

per cent commission for me, and I told him that I didn't want it, that he was to take it off the price that he had quoted her. It was fair business, but it seemed like making money out of her pleasure.

She wrote a cheque and we went over to the restaurant for lunch. The chief pilot was there, and I told him that she had just bought a Moth. He said, "We're having a rally at La Baule in June with the Aero Club de Paris. You must come to that. It's an easy trip, and the week-end's a lot of fun."

"I'll have to think it over," she said. "I'm not very experienced yet."

We went to our table for lunch. "Happy?" I asked.

"Terribly. So happy it can't be true. To go to France for the first time, and fly there in my own aeroplane—it's incredible. I don't know that I'll ever have the courage to do it, and I know that I'll regret it all my life if I don't."

I smiled. "You'll have to start looking for a passenger who knows the ropes. Lots of the club members would jump at the chance of going to La Baule."

"Maybe. What were the registration letters, again?"

"G-EMLF."

"MLF," she said. "Morgan le Fay. That's what I'm going to call her. She was an enchantress, you know."

"It's not a bad name for an aeroplane. Would you like it painted on the nose in small red letters?"

Her eyes danced. "That would be lovely."

"We'll go back to the office and add it to the order."

We did that after lunch, and then she flew me back to Duffington. When we landed in the late afternoon there was nobody there, because the club was closed on Mondays. She taxied up to the closed hangar door, and we got out and unlocked the hangar, and pushed the Moth inside. Then she turned to me and said a little diffidently, "Would you care to have dinner at the Manor? It'll be just Mother and me."

"That's very kind of you. I'd love to come. What time?"

"Seven o'clock. We have dinner about seven thirty."

I walked up to the Manor that evening. It was an old house, part of it Elizabethan. A maid opened the door and showed me into the drawing-room. Mrs. Marshall got up to welcome me and introduced me to her mother, Mrs. Duclos.



JOHN
WORSLEY

I found her to be a somewhat formidable old woman, very direct and straight-spoken. While my pupil was getting sherry for us, she engaged me in conversation. "Brenda tells me that she has bought an aeroplane."

"She did. Do you approve?"

She gave a sort of snort. "It wouldn't make much odds if I approved or not. But—yes, I approve. So long as she doesn't go and kill herself in it. You won't let her do that?"

"Not if I can help it."

"Well, stand back and let me take a look at you."

I stood back for inspection, and I suppose I passed, because the next thing she said was, "She tells me that you shot down eleven Germans in the war."

"Yes," I said. "I'm afraid I did."

"What have you got to be afraid of?"

"Nothing," I said. "Only it doesn't seem now quite such a good thing to have done as it did then."

"You're turning pacifist, are you? What's your name, anyway? I can't keep calling you Captain Pascoe."

"My friends call me Johnnie. I don't think I'm a pacifist. I suppose I'd do it again if there was another war. One sort of goes nuts."

"Everybody goes a bit mental in a war," she said. "But we don't talk of things like that in this house, Johnnie."

I nodded. "I understand that."

My pupil came back with the sherry, and presently we went in to dinner, very well served with silver gleaming on a polished oak table. After dinner we went back to the drawing-room for coffee, and presently I said, "They tell me you're a fine pianist, Mrs. Marshall. Would you play something for me?"

She laughed a little awkwardly. "I'm not as good as that."

"I'd like it if you would."

Mrs. Duclos got up. "I'm going to write some letters. I'll say good night, Johnnie. Come again and cheer us up. It's not very exciting, two women living alone."

"I'd like to do that," I said.

"What sort of music do you like?" Brenda asked.

"Not too classical, and not too low-brow. Something about ten per cent better than tea-room music."

She laughed and sat down at the piano and played a cheerful little melody that she told me was a Hungarian dance by Brahms, and she went on to bits of Chopin and Tchaikovsky. She played beautifully. I could have listened to her all night.

"That was delightful," I said, when she got up and came over to the fire. "That's made my day."

"I'm so glad, because you've made mine." She went out and presently came back with a decanter, a siphon and glasses on a silver tray. She poured me out a drink and then sat down with me by the fire.

Presently she said, "I want to tell you about my husband."

"I know a certain amount already," I said.

She nodded. "I suppose everybody in the village knows all about it. I go and see him twice a week. That's why I go on living here."

"They tell me The Haven's a very good place."

"The best in the country for this sort of thing. Dr. Baddeley is awfully good. People come to him from all over the world."

"Your husband's been there for some time, hasn't he?"

"Nearly three years now. He's perfectly all right for weeks on end, and while he's like that he knows it's better for him to be there. Derek loves golf, and they've got a nine-hole golf course in the grounds. Then he gets another fit, and it's difficult. But when he's well, I think he's quite happy."

"Is there any chance of a cure?"

"It's not very easy to be optimistic, we've had so many disappointments. Before he was certified we'd try something new and he'd be wonderfully well for months, but the relapse always came. Dr. Baddeley says now that he'd want to keep him in The Haven for two years after any new treatment, to make sure. You see, when he was out before there was trouble."

"I know," I said.

"I know you do. All these months while I've been learning to fly you've never said a word to make me feel awkward."

"Could you get a divorce, if you wanted to?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Under British law, there are no grounds for a divorce. Even if it was possible, I don't know that I'd want to do it. You marry for better or worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part. I'd hate myself if I ran out on Derek while

he's sick. And after all, I've had the 'richer' part." She glanced round the room. "This is all his money—the piano, my new Moth—everything."

"Does he know you bought a Moth?" I asked.

"I told him I was going to. I tell him everything, then he doesn't get fussed that things are going on behind his back."

"How does he like the thought of you flying?"

"Oh, he's all for it. He gets worried that I'm having a dull life, you see. He's very sweet—when he's well."

"It's a bad-luck story, all right," I said.

"People can't adjust themselves, you know. Take up new interests. Like flying."

I nodded. "If I may say so, you're looking a lot better than you were in January."

"I *am* a lot better—sleeping better, eating better, feeling younger. I think flying must be good for people."

I laughed. "It's good for you to get scared stiff now and then. Stimulates the flow of adrenalin." I put down my glass. It was time for me to go back to the inn. She was too attractive, and I was too lonely. "I must go," I said. "Thank you for a perfectly delightful evening."

"Thank you for a perfectly delightful day," she said. "I shan't sleep tonight, for thinking of my Moth."

I didn't sleep that night, for thinking about her.

CHAPTER 8

THE GREAT DAY came at last. I got a phone call to say that Brenda's Moth had taken off from Heston. I rang her up at the Manor and she came hurrying to the airport in the Alvis. She was excited, looking about eighteen years old and terribly attractive. We stood on the tarmac looking at the sky towards the south, scanning the clouds. Then we saw a little speck coming towards us, and presently we heard the engine. The speck grew larger, dropping off height as it approached, and presently it flew over the airfield. The pilot saw us and showed the machine off, doing a few right- and left-hand turns at a couple of hundred feet. It was a very pretty little aeroplane, white and crimson, gleaming in the sun.

"Take a good look at it," I said to her. "It's probably the last time you'll see it flying."

She stared at me. "The last time?"

"You'll always be in it, unless you lend it to somebody."

"Oh . . . Doesn't it look *lovely*?"

The pilot landed it. She signed a delivery note, and then drove him to the station; when she came back she hurried to change into her white overalls, and asked me to go with her on her first flight. "Not much," I said. "It hasn't got any dual in the front cockpit. When you pile it up I'd perish miserably. You take your own machine alone for the first time."

"I'm not going to pile it up."

"Of course you're not. I was just joking."

"Don't joke about serious subjects," she said. "If I pile it up I'm going to cut my throat."

"Try it on a gliding turn or two before you come in to land," I said. "They're all just a bit different on the glide."

She got into the cockpit. I swung the prop for her and she ran it up, waved the chocks away and taxied out. I went into the office and stood watching from the window, a little depressed. She had no need of further dual from me.

She flew it for some time, came in for a quick lunch, and flew it again. In the late afternoon she taxied in and we pushed it into the hangar. She brought the three log-books into the office and I showed her how to write them up.

She turned the pages of the journey log-book. "She's been everywhere. Just look at this." We bent over the book, her head close to mine. "Paris, Dijon, Cannes," she breathed. "Milano, Venezia—I'll have to go to some of these places. Le Touquet, Dinard, La Baule. It would be letting her down if I just stuck in England."

"La Baule in June would be an easy first trip on the Continent," I said. "That gives you two months from now."

"Will you be going to La Baule?" she asked.

"Not unless the club decides to make a thing of it and send all three machines," I told her.

"Do try and work it. Then we could go together."

She came out every day in April. She got into the habit of coming to

the office for a cup of tea with me, and twice she asked me up to dinner at the Manor. Once she brought her mother over, and we put the old lady in the front seat of Morgan le Fay and her daughter took her up for a short flight. She took Ronnie Clarke up two or three times. Towards the end of the month she was doing cross-country flights on her own.

Late one afternoon, when it was raining cats and dogs and she had flown to Cambridge, she rang me up. "Johnnie," she said, "I'm at Peterborough, at the airport. I started back and it began to rain, so I put down here. What's it like with you?"

"Horrible," I told her. "I wouldn't try to fly back tonight."

"I ought to get back," she said. "I'm seeing Derek in the morning. I'll have to try and hire a car."

"Would you like me to fetch you in your Alvis?" I asked.

"I'd love that, but it would be terribly tiring for you."

"That's all right. I'll be with you about half past six. Can you get Morgan into a hangar?"

"I don't think so. She'll have to stay out in the open."

"I'll bring down some screw pickets and your engine and cockpit covers," I said.

"Oh, thank you. And Johnnie, would you bring my raincoat and my skirt? They're hanging in the ladies' room. Then we can have dinner somewhere before driving home."

I started off at once, after ringing her mother to tell her what was happening. It was dark by the time I got to Peterborough, and raining harder than ever. I found her waiting for me in a sort of barn at the airport; she had taxied her Moth into the lee of a shed. She was very wet, and very glad to see me. We put on the cockpit and the engine covers and folded the wings and picketed the machine down. She took off her overalls in the back of the barn and got into her skirt and coat.

"Let's go somewhere where we can have a drink," she said. "I'm miserably cold."

"What about the Dog and Duck at Thorganby?" I suggested. "It's on the way home."

We pulled into the yard of the Dog and Duck ten minutes later and ran in through the rain. It is a very old house; there was a bright fire in the bar with chairs in front of it, and nobody there but us. While she was tidying up I ordered a meal.

"Ham and eggs and cold blackberry-pie," I said when she appeared. "They're going to let us have it on a table here, in front of the fire. What would you like to drink, a hot rum toddy?"

"Oh, lovely!"

The landlord fetched a big, black kettle and put it on the fire, where it began to sing. We had a toddy and felt better, so we had another one. Then we had our ham and eggs and blackberry-pie. And finally, we had another hot rum toddy for the road.

It was fine and very dark when we went out into the yard to find the car, and cold. The sudden change of temperature made my head swim a little. She stumbled on the uneven paving, and I caught her arm, and then she was in my arms and I was kissing her, and she was kissing me in return. Then she said quietly, "This is very bad."

"Too many rum toddies," I said. "I'm sorry."

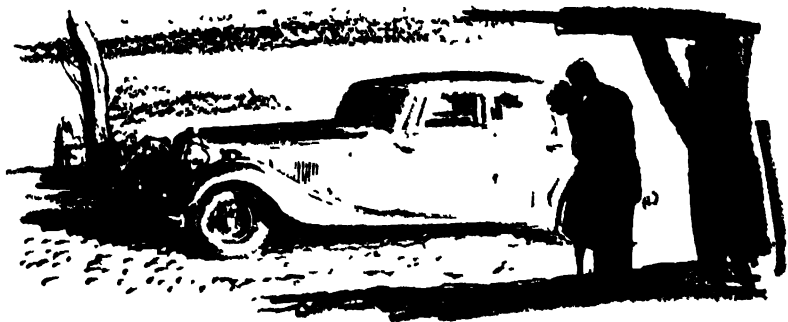
"Too many rum toddies," she repeated. "I'm not." And then she said, "We'll have to think about this, Johnnie."

"Yes," I said. "We'll have to think about it." She released herself gently. "Which of us is going to drive?" I asked. "We're both about as bad as each other."

She said seriously, "Yes, we're both about as bad as each other." Then she laughed a little and said, "You drive, and let me think."

We drove on in silence through the night, her shoulder against mine. We were both busy with our own thoughts. I hadn't wanted it to happen because it was bound to make trouble for us, two lonely people, neither of whom was in a position to marry. Now it had happened, I was glad.

When we were about ten miles from Duffington she said, "Let's park a minute by the side, Johnnie."



I drew up under some trees and turned off the headlights; the rain dripping off the branches made little patterings on the roof. She said, "I want to ask you a horrid question, Johnnie."

"Go ahead," I said.

She asked, "Do you do much of this? Do you have many girls?"

"No," I said. "You're the first girl I've kissed since Judy."

She sighed a little. "That's what I wanted to know. In a way it makes things worse."

"We can try and forget about it, if you like," I suggested.

"We shan't be able to," she said.

She sounded so unhappy that I took her hand. "Don't worry," I said gently. "This has been coming on for a long time. It was bound to happen."

"If things were different this would be the sweetest day of my life. But I'm a married woman, and you're a married man. I'm not the sort of woman who does this sort of thing. And I don't think you're the sort of man."

"We're neither of us so much married as all that," I said.

"You may not be, but I am," she replied.

"I know we're running straight into a packet of trouble," I said. "But nothing that's worth having can be got without a lot of trouble in this world. I want to tell you something. Since we met I've been to a solicitor. I can divorce my wife, he tells me, and we're putting in a petition. She's been living with another chap for the last eight years as his wife. There's half our tangle untied."

"What would you do if I untied the other half?"

"I should want you to marry me."

"Now that you've said it, I don't want you to say it again, Johnnie. Suppose I were to get divorced from Derek, it would take years and years. And people change. We've been thrown together a good deal in the last few months, and you've been terribly kind to me, kinder than any man has ever been in all my life. I've looked forward every day to meeting you again, counting the hours." I pressed her hand. "I've been very silly and rather cruel in return," she said. "If I wasn't prepared to go on with you, I ought not to have let things come to this. You've been very kind to me, and in return I've got to be unkind to you, and hurt you. Try and forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive. I wouldn't have missed a minute of it. Whatever happens, we shall neither of us forget this. But if you'd rather that we didn't see so much of each other, I could get another job. Imperial Airways want pilots."

"You mean you'd go away?"

"I'd do that, if you want me to. If I don't, this'll probably happen again."

"I know. I'm tired, Johnnie—too tired to think properly. I can't imagine what we're going to do—I'll have to sleep on it. But when all's said and done, there's only one person that really matters—Derek. You and I are well. If sad, unpleasant things have to be done, we can do them and battle through. But Derek's ill, and he's my husband. He's the one we've got to think about."

She was quite right, of course, but I couldn't find anything to say. At last she said gently, "Take me home, Johnnie. I'll make up my mind in the next day or two."

"There's no violent hurry, Brenda. I shan't change. Don't take things too hard."

She said softly, "Dear Johnnie"

I pressed the starter, and got the car out on to the rain-swept road again in the black night. We went to the deserted airfield for me to get my own car, and I got out there. "I'll see you in the morning," she said, and drove off.

Several days passed; she came over once or twice and flew her aeroplane. Then one Sunday she suggested we should meet for lunch at Huddlestone, a village about thirty miles away. "It's difficult here," she said a little awkwardly, "with people talking."

"I flew over Huddlestone Wood a day or two ago," I said. "The bluebells must be a sight. You can see the whole ground blue from the air, in the glades. Would you like to picnic there?"

She brightened. "That would be lovely! I'll get the lunch."

We met in the village square at noon, parked her car and drove into the wood in mine. The wood was marvellous, carpeted in bluebells, and the air like wine. We found a fallen tree to sit on for our lunch. Presently she said, "I had a talk with Dr. Baddeley, about Derek and us."

She had told the doctor that if he felt a dissolution of the marriage

would give Derek a set-back, then the marriage would go on. She and Derek had talked about this once or twice when Derek had been in possession of his senses, and he had said that the marriage ought to be dissolved. It would never be safe for them to have a family, and while she was a young woman she should be free to marry again if she wanted to. What did Dr. Baddeley think?

The doctor told her that her husband had expressed the same views to him. He had pointed out that there would have to be grounds for a divorce. Until one of them was guilty of misconduct the marriage would have to go on, and since Derek was in *The Haven* the initiative lay with her. Derek had been very much distressed by that aspect of the matter. But the doctor thought, on the whole, it would ease his patient's mind if the marriage could be brought to an end, though he would like her to continue her visits.

"What's the next thing?" I asked.

"I want to have a talk with Derek," she said. "Would you mind if I tell him who you are?"

"Not a bit. We'd better have this all out in the open."

While we had our lunch she told me about her childhood in Guildford, and I told her about my early life in Canada, and the hours passed like minutes. She had to go back for tea, and we packed the remains of lunch in the basket.

When we were ready she stood up, slender in the afternoon sun against the bluebells, and she said, "If Derek agrees to divorce me, I shall have to give him grounds."

I reached out and took her hand. "With me?"

"I don't know who else," she said seriously.

"Would that be very terrible?" I took her other hand.

"No," she said. "But I wouldn't have wanted to start off in that way."

"It can be play-acting," I told her. "There are hotels in London that cater for this sort of thing. We book a room and register as man and wife, go up at bedtime making sure the porter notices us, and play cards all night in front of the gas fire."

Her eyes danced. "Dominoes."

"All right, dominoes. Then at seven o'clock in the morning we undress and get into bed, and ring for morning tea. Make sure the maid notices us and give her a big tip. She goes to court and gives evidence,

and you get your divorce. When we're both free people, then I'll ask you to marry me and we'll start off clean."

She came into my arms and we kissed, standing on the carpet of the bluebells, in the dappled shadows of the trees. Presently she sighed and said, "We oughtn't to be doing this. We're not free people yet."

I released her. "No," I said. "We'll have to watch our step. It's going to be the thick end of two years before we're free. But it'll pass."

Next week she told Derek. He took it very well. He asked her to see his solicitor and get the thing going with somebody to act for her. I had offered to see him, but he didn't want that; he told her very sensibly that matters of this sort were easier if they were kept as impersonal as possible. She saw his doctor later and he congratulated her on the way she had handled it. He said his patient seemed much easier in his mind.

I scouted round and got the name of a hotel in Bloomsbury that seemed to do a good bit of that sort of thing, and telegraphed to book a double room. I got a couple of days' leave from the club and went up to London, and met her at St. Pancras Station, under the clock. We took a taxi to the hotel and registered as Mr. and Mrs. Pascoe. She had got herself a new suit-case with the initials B. P. on it. In the bleak, utilitarian bedroom with the double bed and the gas fire she showed me this with pride.

We had lunch in the hotel dining-room, and then she wanted to see some herbaceous plants in Kew Gardens, so we went there and walked round all the afternoon while she made notes in a little book for her garden at Duffington.

"I suppose it's rather silly," she said. "I shan't be living there very much longer."

"We'll have a garden of our own, somewhere," I said.

We had dinner at the hotel. I had booked seats for *Lilac Time*; and when we went back to the hotel we were very happy.

In the bedroom we settled down to dominoes. By two in the morning we were both dropping asleep. "Go to bed," I said. "The bed ought to be slept in, anyway. I'll sleep in a chair."

"You wouldn't mind if I did that? It's a bit hard on you."

I laughed. "Go on and go to bed. I won't look."

She did, and went to sleep at once. I dozed intermittently in the chair till dawn came grey over the London roofs, and people started stirring

in the corridors. I got up stiffly and she woke, and sat up in bed "Did you have an awful night?" she asked.

"Not too bad," I told her. "This is the last act, now."

I undressed and put on my pyjamas and got into bed with her. She leaned towards me. "You're looking much too tidy. Let me rumple your hair."

"Not much," I said. "I'll rumple it myself. One thing leads to another."

We sat in bed together for half an hour, laughing and talking happily till we heard the rattle of teacups in the passage. I pressed the bell. "Now for a cup of tea."

A maid about forty years old came in, a horse-faced woman with a slightly humorous expression. I ordered tea, and then I winked at her, as I had been told to do. She smiled, and crossed the room to close the window, taking a good look round the room as she did so. When she brought the tea she took a good look at us both in bed. As the door shut behind her, Brenda asked, "Is that all, Johnnie?"

"That's all. I'll go out in a minute and get her name."

In the corridor I found the chambermaid hanging about. "Thank you for looking after us," I said. "Here's something to remember us by." I put two five-pound notes into her hand.

She said, "Thank you, sir. My name's Doris Swanson. I'm sure I hope that you and the lady will be very happy."

When we went down to breakfast, Brenda said, "Thank you for everything, Johnnie. I was rather dreading this, but it's been lovely, all the time."

I grinned at her. "Like to do it again, one day?"

"Not just like this," she said.

APRIL CAME to an end, with Brenda coming out to fly practically every day. We started on a mass of legal work. There were three solicitors engaged in our divorce proceedings, one for Derek, one for Brenda and one for me; mine was also working on my own divorce. Whenever I wasn't flying I seemed to be in a solicitor's office.

There was an air pageant at Sherburn-in-Elmet, the airport for Leeds, early in May. We took up two club machines, and Brenda took her Moth. I didn't want her to fly in a race just yet but she went in for the

landing competition and won it by a most colossal fluke, finishing up her landing run with one wheel slap in the middle of the two-yard bull's-eye. She also won the *Concours d'Elégance*, but I suspect that was due to her white boiler suit and the short, curly hair. She flew back to Leacaster with two silver cups, bursting with pride

Derek's solicitor got in touch with Doris Swanson and she came to Leacaster to identify Brenda. Derek signed the papers petitioning for his divorce, and the case went down for hearing in the autumn.

At a committee meeting of the Leacaster Aero Club I told them that more members than we had seats for in the machines wanted to go to the Rally at La Baule with the Aero Club de Paris, and suggested that we take all three machines; Mrs. Marshall also wanted to go. The chairman questioned whether she had enough experience to fly abroad. I suggested that I fly with her and lead the club flight. They thought that was a very good idea.

I wasn't worried about the Bluebird or about Brenda's Moth, but the other two machines had a habit of shedding their exhaust-valve seatings from the cylinder head. I made sure that the pilots of those two machines were experienced chaps, accustomed to forced landings, and I took a selection of spare parts and tools distributed between the machines.

Brenda was thrilled at the prospect of this excursion. She bought a set of gramophone records teaching French, and she collected all the maps and drew thick blue pencil lines on them with distance and magnetic course carefully pencilled against each.

We started off from Duffington on a Friday morning in June. The weather was good but the forecast was a bit doubtful, with a low coming up from the Atlantic and a chance of rain. The quicker we got across the Channel the better. I briefed my four pilots, and appointed a member named Knox-Turner, who had been on Bristol fighters in the war, as deputy flight commander to me. Then we took off one by one and got on course for Lympne, with Brenda and myself leading in the white Moth. We landed and refuelled, and had a quick sandwich lunch in the club. Then we took off over the Channel for Cap Gris-Nez, as I had taken off with the Camel squadron twelve years before, and passed over the spot where Calvert went down in the sea. Sad memories of those days revived in me. Then I turned and glanced at Brenda, bright-eyed and excited, and came back to the present.

We flew down the coast at about fifteen hundred feet, passing Boulogne, Abbeville, Dieppe and Le Havre. I was starting to think about our landing in Dinard when Knox-Turner in one of the club Moths suddenly started to lose height. His engine was vibrating like a jelly and shooting tongues of flame out of the exhaust. He throttled back and started in on the approach for a forced landing. I signalled to the other two machines to keep circling round, and spoke to Brenda down the voice-pipe. She throttled back and went down after Knox-Turner, keeping well out of his way. He picked a good big field and put down into it. We circled round at about two hundred feet and saw them get out, Knox-Turner pointing at the engine. We waved to them and started to climb back towards the other two machines; and I pin-pointed the position on my map. It was near a village called Unverre.

I led the other two machines to Dinard, where we landed and taxied in to clear the customs, and I told the *douane* officers about the machine that had forced-landed near Unverre. They were very nice about it, but refused a lift back with me; they didn't seem to care for flying. I hired a car to take one of them to Unverre. Brenda offered to fly me back, so we told the other four club members to fix themselves up in the hotel for the night and we would rejoin forces later.

When we got back to the other machine, they had got the cowl off the engine and had diagnosed the trouble, a valve seating, as I had suspected. We borrowed a couple of chairs from a near-by cottage to stand on, and with an audience of French countrymen and children I started in on the engine, while Brenda practised her French on them. It was about four hours before we got it all together again, and the sun was setting. We did a ground run using the branch of a tree for chocks and the engine seemed all right, but it was getting too dark to do the test flight. We should have to spend the night at Unverre.

We were very tired by that time, and we had had nothing to eat since lunch. We picketed the two Moths down and went into Unverre in the local taxi. The whole thing was a delight to Brenda, who had never before seen a French village or had a French meal. She had changed into a skirt in the taxi while we were dealing with the plane. We had a very good meal at the one inn, thick country soup, roast duck, salad and cheese, washed down with Burgundy. The inn had only one bedroom, which Knox-Turner took after he had phoned a bigger hotel at Coudray

for us; and Brenda and I got into the taxi again and drove three miles to Coudray. When we got there, we discovered there was some confusion, probably due to Knox-Turner's French. There was only one bedroom vacant there, too, though it had two double beds in it.

I said, "We can go on to Bayeux."

She said, "It's so late, Johnnie. Don't you think we'd better take this? It's not as if we'd never done it before."

"As you think," I said.

She turned to Madame at the door. "*C'est bien,*" she said.

The old lady smiled at us. "*Bonne nuit, monsieur et madame, et bon repos.*" She closed the door on us.

"If we keep on doing this," I remarked, "something's going to happen, one of these days."

She came into my arms. "We'll be free people before long. Does it really matter if it does?"

CHAPTER 9

T*he trouble when you take a Nembutal is that you must go on sleeping for the allotted time. However great the distress that dreams impose upon you, you cannot jerk yourself fully awake till the effect of the drug has eased. I think I may have been partially successful in my struggle because I can remember the whistle of the wind, the rain beating on the window. Or perhaps it was some noise that Dr. Turnbull made when he brought in the nurse. Whatever it was, I had to go on sleeping with a dream that turned to nightmare. . . .*

WHEN WE flew back to England after the air pageant we carried with us in the luggage locker of Morgan le Fay another silver cup, which Brenda had won in the Ladies' Race. At Lymgne I took over the piloting because Brenda was getting tired. We landed at Duffington at about five o'clock in the afternoon with all four machines in good order. As we got out on the tarmac, she said, "It's been marvellous, Johnnie. The most wonderful week-end I've ever had."

I smiled at her. "We're going to have a lot more like it."

And then we had to cut it out, because the others were getting out of their machines.

When I went into the bar Sam Collins, the landlord, and Sergeant Entwhistle of the police were there. As he gave me my beer Sam asked about the trip, and I told them about Brenda's cup.

"Did you know Dr. Baddeley at The Haven?"

I had to be cautious here. "I've met him," I said.

"He got murdered," the landlord told me. "Chap jumped out at him as he was going home from the hospital after midnight, beat him to death with a bit of iron bar."

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "When did that happen?"

"Friday night," he said. That was the night we spent at Coudray.

It seemed that Dr. Baddeley lived in a house two streets from The Haven. Normally he would have occupied the Medical Superintendent's house inside the grounds, but he had three children and disliked bringing them up in the surroundings of a mental home. He put his deputy, Dr. Somers, into the Superintendent's house, but he was meticulous in turning out at night to visit any patient who required attention. He was walking home through the deserted streets soon after midnight when an ex-patient, recently released, sprang out on him and beat him to death. They had got the man without much difficulty.

Presently I went and had my supper and went to bed. I had a sense of impending disaster all that night, but there was nothing I could do about it.

Brenda came to the airport next day, and we walked together up the boundary hedge. "It's terrible," she said, and all the brightness of the last few months seemed to have gone out of her. "Poor Dr. Baddeley . . ."

"Do you think it will make any difference to us?"

"Dr. Somers is so terribly *righteous*. I'm pretty sure he doesn't approve of this divorce."

"What makes you think that?"

"He's very different from Dr. Baddeley. More up to date, more rigid, sticking by the rules. Like a young schoolmistress in a modern school, who's learned it all out of a book." She paused, and then she said, "Dr. Baddeley was so *kind*."

I took her hand. "There's nothing to worry over," I said. "The divorce is all in train now."

"I know. But when I went there to see Derek this morning, he was sort of bad-tempered."

There was nothing I could do to make things easier for her, except to give her the assurance of my love.

In the next few weeks she told me very little about Derek, but I gathered that he had turned sullen and uncommunicative. "I'm sure he'll be happier when this divorce goes through," she told me once. Whenever it was fine after her visit to The Haven, she used to come out to the airport and fly her aeroplane, playing in and out among the clouds. It seemed to ease her mind, and drive away her anxieties.

One morning in late July she rang me up and said, "Johnnie, I want to meet you for a talk. Could we go to Huddlestone this afternoon?"

I thought quickly. "I've got a lesson at three and another one at four. I'll be there by half past five."

When I drove into the village she was waiting for me, pale and quiet. She said, "Let's go into the wood." So we walked down the lane together and into the wood, fragrant and cool and silent. I took her hand, and said, "What's the trouble, Brenda?"

"Three troubles," she said. "The first is, Derek's withdrawn his petition for a divorce."

"That's a bad one," I said quietly. "What's behind it?"

"Dr. Somers. That's the second trouble. I asked him if he knew anything about Derek's change of mind, and he said that, unlike his predecessor, he thought a doctor shouldn't try to influence his patient in matrimonial affairs. He thought that Derek was quite well enough to make up his own mind. In the nine months that he had had Derek under observation he had not detected any symptoms that he would describe in court as mental illness. There had been fits of bad temper, sometimes associated with violence, but these could occur with any strong-willed person kept under restraint."

I stared at her. "But what about the case Derek was in court for?"

"He said there were two sorts of people who would do a thing like that, criminals and criminal lunatics. He said nothing he had observed confirmed the supposition that Derek was a criminal lunatic. He was beginning to feel that the certification of insanity was due for a review."

"Does this mean that he's going to let him out?"

"That's what he was hinting at. I think he's been putting the same idea into Derek's head, and that's why he isn't going on with the divorce."

It was very bad, whichever way you looked at it. The worst of it was, I could see Dr. Somers's point of view. Since I had known Brenda I had kept my ears open for gossip about Derek. I knew the efforts that his family had made to keep him out of prison. If Dr. Somers wasn't going to have his mental home cluttered up with criminals who would be in prison if they hadn't had the money for a first-class defence, one couldn't help feeling sympathy for him.

I asked her, "What's the third trouble?" I knew the answer to that one, of course.

She faced me. "I'm in the family way."

"That's not a trouble," I said. "That's a good thing. I've been hoping for that."

She stared at me, bewildered, and then she smiled, and burst into tears. I took her in my arms, and when her sobs had eased, I said, "We've wanted to have a family, and now we're going to have one. It's going to make things a little bit more complicated, but we'll get over that." I wiped her eyes with my handkerchief.

"A little bit more complicated," she sobbed. "That's an understatement."

"There's two of us to work things out together," I said. "First of all, I think I ought to have a talk with your mother. I'll be scared stiff, but after all I'm responsible."

When I got back to Duffington I went into the office and rang up Mrs. Duclos. I told her that I wanted to have a private talk with her, and she told me to come along that evening.

When I was shown into the drawing-room of the Manor, Mrs. Duclos got up to meet me. "Brenda went to bed," she remarked. "Said she was tired."

"I know," I said. "I arranged that with her. There's something that you'll have to know. Brenda's in the family way, and I'm responsible."

She stared at me, erect, angry and formidable. "You've got a nerve, young man, to come and tell me that! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I suppose so," I said wearily. "But I'm not. We both wanted this to happen sometime. It's a pity it had to be so soon."

"Sit down," she said.

We sat before the fire. When she spoke again she sounded much older.

"I won't pretend this is a surprise," she said. "I may have hoped you'd have more sense, but I don't know that I really thought you would. What are you going to do now?"

"Do you think Derek would go on with the divorce, in view of this?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Not unless he sees some advantage to himself."

"He wouldn't give any consideration to Brenda's position?"

"I don't think he would. If Dr. Baddeley had been alive, he might have talked him round."

There was a short pause. "Which of the three of us would be the best person to go and see him?" I asked. "I'm quite ready to."

She shook her head. "Not you. I'll go. Perhaps I'll go and have a talk with his eldest brother, George, first, up in Halifax. He's got a good head on his shoulders. He might help."

"Suppose Derek won't have a divorce, and Dr. Somers lets him out. There's only one thing we could do. I'd have to get a job abroad, and Brenda would have to come with me as my wife. Imperial Airways want pilots for their Far Eastern service. It means living in New Delhi, or Rangoon, or Singapore, but I could get a job with them, I think." I paused. "I don't suppose they'd want to see our marriage lines."

She shook her head. "Brenda wouldn't go. She's Derek's wife." I was silent. "You don't know her very well," she went on. "A divorce when a continuation of her marriage was hopeless—yes. She accepted that. But to leave her husband and go away with you, unmarried—Brenda would never do that." She stared into the fire. "I think I shall go up to Halifax tomorrow," she said. "George might be able to talk Derek round."

There was really nothing more to discuss. As I said good-bye to her, I said, "I'm very sorry about all this."

"No good being sorry now," she observed, curtly. "I read a poem when I was a girl, by Arthur Hugh Clough. It was about the Ten Commandments." And then she quoted:

*"Do not adultery commit;
Advantage rarely comes of it."*

"He was dead right," I remarked, and went back to the hotel. George Marshall came down next week-end. He went to The Haven

on Saturday morning, and that afternoon Brenda brought him out to the airport. He was a big heavy man about fifty years old, very Yorkshire, with an air of solid prosperity about him. They sat in deck-chairs on the lawn of the club-house, waiting until my lessons were over. I landed for the last time at about six o'clock, and walked over to them.

"Ye've got a champion little club here, Mr. Pascoe," he remarked. "Do ye make it pay?"

"It makes a profit," I told him. "Not a very large one, because we keep the cost as low as we can for the members."

"Aye, that's one way of doing it." And then he said, "Ye'll be wondering how I got on this morning. Well, I've no good news for you. Derek will have nowt to do with any divorce."

"You told him about Brenda?"

"Aye. Couple of scallywags, the pair of you, that's what I say. Still, what's done can't be undone, and the only thing is, make the best of it. That's what I told Derek. He said he'd be getting out of The Haven before long, and then he'd make his mind up what to do."

"Is he going to get out soon?"

"If that Dr. Somers has anything to do with it, he will. Proper ninny that one is. But there's two needed to sign the certificate, and two to unsign it. It's not unsigned yet."

"You think he should stay in?"

"Aye," he said heavily, "I do. Always queer was Derek, ever since he was a little lad. Always doing things we had to cover up."

"How soon would he be likely to get out?"

"These things take a while. I wouldn't think that it would be before October, at the earliest."

I said, "October's a bad time for a miscarriage."

Brenda flushed and looked annoyed, but George Marshall slapped me on the shoulder. "Eh, lad," he laughed. "I like a man that calls a spade a spade." He turned to Brenda. "Don't look so put out, lass, he's got the rights of it. It wouldn't do for you to be in Duffington when Derek gets out of The Haven. Ye'll have to go away and live quiet for the sake of the baby. When's it to be?"

"March," she said.

"Well, now, what about America? There's fine doctors and hospitals in New York, and I'll see you right for brass."

She was silent. This loud-spoken, positive man was driving her along more quickly than he should. But she recognized his good will.

"If I've got to go anywhere, couldn't I go to France?"

We talked about that for a little while. It would be better for her to go before her condition became apparent. She could give out that she was going to spend the winter in the south of France, with her mother. If she came back to Duffington in the spring with a baby—well, that was a bridge we could cross when the time came. Everything might have changed by then.

George Marshall repeated his offer to finance her if Derek cut off her allowance. She was grateful, but I was not too well pleased. When they were leaving, I got him on one side. "It's very good of you to offer the money, Mr. Marshall," I said. "But I can look after that. I've got a bit saved up."

"How much have ye got?" he asked directly.

"Nearly five hundred pounds." I was including the value of my car.

"And ye'll need every penny of it if you're going to set up as a married man. I tell ye straight, Mr. Pascoe, I'm right sorry for the lass, and so is my wife. She's had a rough spin from the Marshall family and it's not for us to turn our backs on her now. No, leave the brass to me, and save your money till you're setting up a household. Ye'll need it then."

I could only thank him.

CHAPTER 10

THE FIRST TIME Brenda went to visit Derek in The Haven there was so violent a scene that she had to leave. Dr. Somers asked her to suspend her visits till Derek expressed a wish to see her. This was distressing to her; she felt that she was living in the Manor under false pretences.

In the weeks that followed I dined at the Manor many times. We were still careful about being seen about together. On Mondays when the airport was closed we used to go off separately in our cars, park one of them in some village ten miles away, and go on in the other to the heather-covered moors, happy to be together, walking or sitting talking in the sunshine, forgetting our troubles for a few hours.

Towards the end of August, up on the backbone of England on the

purple hills, she asked me, "Do you think I could fly to Cannes in Morgan le Fay? I'd like to find a nice quiet hotel, and inquire about nursing homes and doctors."

"You'd go solo?"

"You couldn't come, could you?"

I shook my head. "Not at this time of year."

"Then I'd rather go alone. This may be the last chance I'll have to do a long flight, on my own. Later on the weather may be bad, and anyway I wouldn't want to fly when the baby gets well on the way. And after he's born, I would like to have one really good, long flight to look back on."

We got down to it with the maps that evening, planning her flight in easy stages of not much more than a hundred miles each. She pored over the maps with me, entranced.

"I'll never get to Cannes," she said. "I'll want to stop so long at all these places—Paris, Dijon, Avignon. . .

The excitement of this journey was very good for her; she was brighter and more cheerful than she had been for weeks. In the next few days I marked all her maps with a thick blue line from place to place, with the distance in red pencil, and the magnetic course going out in blue and coming back in green. I got her a course-and-distance calculator and showed her how to use it to check drift. Then she was ready to go.

I put her bag of spares and tools in the front cockpit with her suitcase and strapped them down, her log-books and clean overalls in the rear locker. She was as pretty and excited as she had been on her first solo. I stood watching as she took off and vanished to the south.

It was lonely at Duffington without her, but she sent me telegrams from every place where she stopped, and a letter every couple of days, and I wrote to her every day.

One afternoon towards the end of September she flew in, unfastened her helmet and got out of the machine, her overalls smeared a little with dirt and oil.

"It was simply glorious," she said. "Nothing went wrong, I never got lost—I never touched the spares. And I could make them understand me, Johnnie!"

She wanted me to go up to the Manor for dinner that night so that she could show me some photographs she had taken.

When I got there she was waiting in the drawing-room with her mother. The radiant happiness had disappeared, and she was looking white and drawn. "Things have been happening in the last few days, Johnnie," she said. "Derek."

Mrs. Duclos said, "He's applied for his certificate to be annulled."

"How soon shall we know?" I asked.

"The Commissioners in Lunacy are coming down to examine him. Dr. Somers said he'd let us know."

It seemed that Derek had personally made an application to the hospital visiting committee. He had acted in a very restrained and sensible manner. Dr. Somers had backed his application, which had gone to the Commissioners in Lunacy. A doctor and a barrister were to come down and examine him. If their report was favourable, Derek would be free.

The photographs, the flight, her happiness were all forgotten, and we were back in the same dreary mess. We talked about it all evening. Mrs. Duclos had rung George Marshall and he was doing something about it in London. I said finally, "I think you both ought to go to Cannes as soon as you can." Brenda had found a pleasant and inexpensive place there.

Brenda sat in thought, her chin cupped in her hand. "Of course, I'd love to go. It's such a lovely place. But what would Derek have here to come home to? I mean there'd just be the servants."

Mrs. Duclos said, "I think that's a matter for the Marshalls, dear. One of Derek's sisters would have to come and keep house for him. Johnnie's right. You ought to get away from here."

Brenda said, "It's like running away."

She knew she would have to go, but she fought for a long time against a decision. In the end, she agreed. We arranged that they should leave in about three days' time, and Brenda turned to me. "You'll look after Morgan le Fay for me, Johnnie?"

"I'll look after her," I said. "She'll be all ready for you to fly next summer."

She said wistfully, "I'd like to fly to Spain. Could we do that together some day?"

"Next summer," I promised her. "I'll get leave."

She came out to the airport and flew her Moth once more. Then we put it at the back of the hangar and folded the wings and covered it up.

"You'll be sure they turn the engine every week?" she asked me anxiously.

I pressed her arm. "Don't worry. I'll look after her myself."

A couple of days later I saw them off at the station. It was terribly, terribly lonely when they'd gone.

Some time after that George Marshall rang me up from the Manor, and asked if I would run up there to see him. I went at once. He had undertaken to see that the house would be ready for Derek if he came out of The Haven. I asked when the Commissioners were coming to examine him.-

"The sixteenth of October," he said. That was a fortnight hence. "But I'd be surprised if they should let him out."

"I thought it was a certainty," I said.

"It never was that. . . ." He stood and thought for a moment, and then he said, "Ye've a right to know how things are, Mr. Pascoe. When Derek was in trouble and was certified three years ago, the court and the Commissioners didn't know the half of it. We didn't see the sense in making a bad matter worse by raking up old troubles, things we'd been able to cover up and no scandal, and all forgotten about. Now, it's different. We wouldn't want to see him given the responsibility of living his own life again."

He paused and then said heavily, "I went and saw Mr. Justin Forbes, in his chambers, and told him everything that had happened since Derek was a little lad. He's one of the Commissioners. He had it typed out as a formal statement, and I swore to it."

"If the Commissioners decide to keep him in, Brenda and Mrs. Duclos could come back here?"

"Aye. But she'll be four months gone by then, and better she should stay where they are, and save the scandal. When all this has blown over, say about Christmas time, I'll come down and see if Derek will go on with the divorce."

"Does Brenda know you've seen the Commissioner?"

He shook his head. "I'd as soon you didn't tell her, either. Just leave it be, and tell her what the Commissioners decide. Least said, soonest mended."

Thereafter life went on in a normal routine. I lived for Brenda's letters, and I think she did for mine. Presently the Commissioners

arrived, examined Derek, and decided that he had better stay where he was. I telegraphed the news to Brenda.

The Leacaster Club gave their pilot-instructor three weeks' leave every year. I had taken no leave the previous year, and the Committee permitted me to take two spells of a fortnight each, one in January and one in March. Early in January I left for France.

That fortnight was a delightful time. Brenda was very well, and more composed than I had expected to find her. She had had no contact with her husband since she had left Duffington, and though she was growing tired of the hotel life she was well adjusted to it. She went to concerts, and she showed me, rather shyly, two or three of her water-colour paintings. She was now working on one of her *Moth in flight*. She had got it a bit wrong, and I was able to help her. We worked at this together for a couple of mornings, and it was tremendous fun.

She had acquired a little Renault through the generosity of George Marshall and we made long drives. She had decided the coming baby was to be a boy, and she had two or three books on infant welfare in her room. She was very optimistic about a divorce; perhaps in Cannes it was easier to be optimistic than in the grey midlands of England. She thought it would be better if I could get a job abroad as a commercial pilot so that when we married we could start off fresh in a new place. She realized that that meant the tropics in all probability and she welcomed that for herself. But what were the problems of a baby in a hot country? Did I know of any book about it?

Once she said, "I suppose we'll have to go back to Duffington at first, after the baby's born?"

"Would you like a little house somewhere not too far from Duffington, in Oxford, say?" I suggested.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "If I didn't go back to Duffington it would be like running away."

"It might look odd, if you went back there with a baby." I was very disinclined for her to go back there.

"After Derek's case, nobody ever comes to our house anyway." She paused. "I thought I might say he was my sister's baby."

"Have you got a sister?" I asked.

"No. But one has to say something." She had her own way of looking at things, and I went back home reasonably happy about her.

In Duffington I found a letter waiting for me from George Marshall. He had failed again to make Derek consider a divorce. It seemed probable that Dr. Somers had been talking.

In two months I was off again to Cannes. Brenda had picked a pleasant little hospital on one of the hills behind the town, and a few days after I arrived the baby was born, and it was a girl.

I saw Brenda that evening. She was weak, exhausted and terribly disappointed. She had convinced herself that it was going to be a boy and that he would be a pilot, like his father. I tried to cheer her up.

"I'd rather have a girl," I said.

A tear trickled down her cheek. "I did so want a boy."

I wiped it away gently. "Girls can be pilots, too." She smiled faintly, and squeezed my hand. Then the French sister came and made me go away.

She recovered her strength quickly, but the sense of disappointment persisted. I raised the question of the baby's name once or twice, she had decided to wait to have her baptized till they returned to England. I wanted to call her Brenda, and she agreed to that without much interest. She was fond of the child, but decided to wean her at an early stage.

Her mind was set more on flying her Moth that summer than it was on nursing her child. If it had been a boy, I think things might have been different.

I went back to Duffington before Brenda left the hospital. She planned to go back to the hotel with her mother and a nurse; they would come back to Duffington about the end of April. I flew Brenda's Moth down to Heston for the renewal of the Certificate of Airworthiness. She would fly it back on her way home.

Her mother and the baby and the nurse arrived by train; the next day I got a telephone call from Heston in the afternoon to say that she had taken off. Young Ronnie Clarke was learning to fly at that time, and he was coming out for a lesson at four o'clock. He was a very quick pupil; he had soaked himself in theoretical knowledge for years before he commenced instruction, and he had flown so many hours as a passenger in club machines that I could have sent him off solo quite safely after about three hours' dual. The insurance regulations demanded eight hours, so I had been teaching him aerobatics. We were up at about three thousand feet that afternoon and I was showing him how to roll off the top

of a loop; each time we came upright and climbed for another one I scanned the horizon to the south, looking for Morgan le Fay.

I saw her as a faint speck in the distance about half-way through the lesson; we came round into loose formation with her and flew together the last five miles waving at each other. I held Ronnie off and made him do a circuit while she went in to land, and I watched her till she was down.

She met us, radiant, on the tarmac, and it was just like the old days. Ronnie switched off the engine and we sat unbuckling our helmets, and she came up to the machine.

"Johnnie, it's simply glorious to be back," she said. "How's Ronnie getting on?"

"Getting on all right," I said. "He could make anybody sick now. Have a good flight up?"

"Beautiful," she said. "Morgan's flying a bit left wing low, I think. It's so lovely to be back. . . ."

"Lovely for us," I said. We got out on the tarmac and pushed the machines into the hangar. Ronnie went into the office, and when he was out of sight I took her in my arms and kissed her.

"We oughtn't to be doing this," she murmured. "Not in the hangar. You'll lose your job."

"We won't do it again. But this is a special occasion."

I had brought her Alvis to the hangar. "Will you come up for dinner tomorrow night?" she said as she got into the car.

"I'd love to. We'll have to fix up something about the christening."

"I'll see the vicar about that. I think he'll do it privately for us at the Manor. I registered the birth in Cannes."

"What name did you give her?"

She smiled. "Brenda. Brenda Margaret. I thought she ought to have two."

I went up to the Manor next evening. Already the spontaneous gaiety of her arrival had been dissipated. The vicar had proved difficult over the christening; he said that her baby should have been christened in Cannes by the resident Church of England clergyman, and he couldn't understand why it hadn't been. He could not refuse to baptize a child presented to him, but he would do it in church and nowhere else. Brenda had had to explain to him the general position of affairs and the necessity

of avoiding a public scandal. He had said that in the circumstances he would require the permission of the Bishop before baptizing the child privately. It had all been rather unpleasant.

She had rung up Dr. Somers and asked if her husband would like her to visit him. He had warned her that the subject was a delicate one and he would have to approach it tactfully. He would ring her before the end of the week.

I went back to the Seven Swans that night deeply troubled. It seemed to me that we had made a vast mistake in bringing her back to Duffington with her baby, and that nothing but trouble lay ahead of us. I should have insisted on a little house at Oxford, even if it meant that I could only see her once a week. At Duffington Manor she was living with my child in an entirely false position from a twisted sense of loyalty to her husband, and I could see no way to put things right.

She came out and flew her Moth next day. It seemed to put her mind at rest, and she came down far more composed and cheerful than when she had taken off. On the following evening she rang me up just as I was leaving the field. She said, "Johnnie, can you come up here at once? I've got to talk to you."

"Of course," I said. "What is it?"

She said dully, "Derek's escaped from The Haven."

"My God!" I said. "I'll be with you straight away."

When I got to the Manor she told me the story. There was an iron grille gate to the high-walled grounds of The Haven. That afternoon the gardener had unlocked it to push a barrow through; at the same time one of the nurses was fiddling with the engine of her car about fifty yards from the grille. She moved a chafed wire, and the horn began to sound—loud, raucous and continuous.

The staff of The Haven knew that sudden noises can excite mental patients and make them almost unmanageable, and the gardener dropped everything, and went to help the nurse stop it. It was over an hour before they discovered that Derek was no longer there. Later, they discovered that he had pawned his silver cigarette-case in the city and had vanished in the crowds.

It was bad, any way you looked at it. My first concern was for Brenda and her baby, not to mention her mother and the nurse and cook.

"I'll sleep here tonight," I said.

"There's no need to do that. He won't come home. It's the first place they'd look for him. He's only got to stay free for a fortnight."

"After a fortnight he's regarded as sane, isn't he?"

"That's right," she said. "'Then he's got to be re-certified. I don't think Dr. Somers would certify him—not unless he does something bad."

"Do you think he will?"

She sighed wearily. "Not in the next fortnight, anyway."

I took her hand. "Look, dear," I said, "this puts the lid on it. You can't stay here. He'll come back in a fortnight. I'll slip down to Oxford tomorrow and find a furnished house."

"It won't do, Johnnie," she said sadly. "It just won't do. I'm his wife."

"He agreed to divorce you. By this time you'd have been married to me; but he's not right in the head, and he went back on it. We can't go along on those lines, dear. They're crazy lines."

"I know they are," she said. "Some day perhaps we'll get them straightened out. But in the meantime, I'm his wife, and this is where I'll have to stay till he comes home. Perhaps when I see him I'll be able to talk him round."

I could not move her from that, and presently I left her and went back to the village.

The fortnight would be up on May twelfth. On May thirteenth Derek might be expected to show up, if they hadn't caught him before. There was absolutely nothing I could do about it though. I tried once more to make Brenda go away with her mother and the baby, but I only succeeded in annoying her. The nurse, not liking the atmosphere, gave notice and left. There had been a story in the newspapers about Derek's escape.

Throughout that fortnight the tension grew, till it became nearly unbearable. I knew that Brenda was taking sleeping tablets. I didn't do that myself because drugs and flying don't mix very well, and I used to lie awake most nights till two or three in the morning. On top of the anxiety over Derek, I had a terrible feeling that Brenda was growing away from me. Our aims were different. I wanted her to leave her husband and become my wife in fact, if not in law. She wanted to stay with him, not because she loved him but because she had a sense of duty, almost like a nun. She was terrified of his return, but she was moving away from me to face it on planes that I could not reach.

She came out to the airport on the morning of the eleventh. She went to the club-house to change, and came back to the machine. I was in the cockpit running up the engine for her. She went into the office for a moment and came out. I throttled back and got out, and she got in without speaking. She fastened her belt, smiled at me, and taxied out to take off.

I watched till she was in the air, and then went into the office. There was a note on my desk. It read :

Dear Johnnie—
Thank you for everything.
Brenda

I dashed out on to the tarmac, with a feeling of disaster in my throat. She was coming over the airport at seven or eight hundred feet, flying straight and level. Then as I watched, she throttled back the engine, pulled the nose of the machine right up, and kicked on full rudder. The Moth hesitated for a moment, then fell over in a spin.

I breathed, "Oh, God . . . please . . . no!"

I stood watching her in horror. At three hundred feet she was still spinning, and I shouted to the men to get the crash wagon. The elevators were still hard up, the rudder hard over. Then she centred the controls and the machine stopped spinning, and went into a straight dive, gathering speed quickly. She never made the slightest effort to pull out. She hit the ground near the far hedge with a dull thud and a splintering noise of wood. As I ran, I heard the crash wagon start up behind me.



CHAPTER 11

FOR THE second time that night I woke from a bad dream. I was sweating and trembling, and for a time I didn't know where I was. I thought that

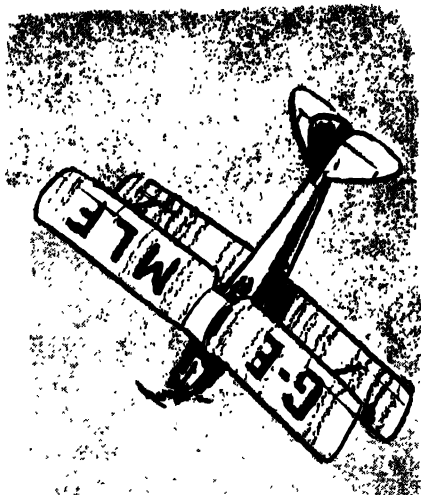
I was in the small hotel that I had lived in in New Delhi, where I had woken up in that way practically every night. Brenda was dead, and now the baby was dead, the only part of Brenda that was left to me. I had killed our baby by neglect for I had gone away to India and left her. Mine was the guilt, and my punishment was to go on living in loneliness and shame.

I reached out for the letter from Mrs. Duclos to read it for the hundredth time, though I knew every word by heart. It wasn't there, and my torch wasn't there either. As consciousness came back to me I realized my hand was on the standard of a table lamp. I found the switch and turned it on and lay blinking in the flood of light. I was in Johnnie Pascoe's room, and everything was all right. I hadn't just seen the girl I loved dive in. I hadn't killed her baby by neglect. I wasn't in New Delhi.

It was a bad dream, a nightmare.

I lay there, gradually calming down. I was Ronnie Clarke, and Sheila was waiting for me back at Essendon, and Peter, and Diana. It was all right. Presently I looked at the wrist-watch on the table by my side. It was only half past twelve. I had had a few hours of sleep, though whether it had done me much good was another matter. There was time for another spell of sleep, but I knew I shouldn't get it till I had composed my mind. The one thing that I wasn't going to do was to take another Nembutal: I had a hard job of flying to do at dawn and I would need all my wits about me.

I got out of bed, put on Johnnie Pascoe's dressing-gown and slippers. I went through to the sitting-room, and stood rooted in the doorway, sick with horror. The fire had been made up and was glowing red, but all the lights were out. And there, in the firelight, in the white boiler suit that she had worn the day she died, curled up in the arm-chair and asleep, was Brenda Marshall.



I suppose I made some exclamation, because the girl in the arm-chair stirred and sat up. The white boiler suit melted away and resolved itself into a nurse's white starched uniform. The short, curly, reddish-brown hair that I had expected wasn't there; this girl had darkish, wavy hair, shingled at the back. The face was vaguely familiar, but quite different. It wasn't Brenda Marshall at all, and I had been a fool.

She brushed the hair back from her face, and stood up. "Are you Captain Clarke?" she asked.

I nodded, and then I hesitated while I gathered my wits together. "You must be the nurse."

"Yes, I'm Sister Dawson," she replied. "Dr. Turnbull brought me here. I hope we didn't wake you when we came in?"

I shook my head. "I never heard you. I thought you were going to sleep in the other room."

"It's a bit messy in there, and very cold. I thought I'd get a better night if I slept in the chair by the fire. I hope you don't mind."

"I don't mind," I said. "I'm only sorry I woke you up. I didn't know you were here. I just came in for a match." I took the box from the mantelpiece and lit a cigarette, then I recalled my manners and offered her the packet.

"Thanks." She took one. "What time are we taking off?" she said.

"I'd like to get into the air soon after six." I crossed to the window, and pulled the curtain aside. The wind was strong, but the rain had stopped. There was an overcast at about two thousand feet, but behind it there was a moon, and there were flying, fitful gleams of moonlight on the countryside. I let the curtain fall, went over and tapped the barometer; it had risen in the night, and was still rising. "It's looking better," I said. "Did Dr. Turnbull explain to you about the trip?"

"Yes, sir. He told me that there'd be no cabin door, and we'd have to jump out. He gave me a ski-suit and boots. I'll take this uniform with me, and a theatre gown for the operation."

They seemed to have got their side of it all buttoned up. "Okay," I said. "You'd better try and get a bit more sleep."

She hesitated, then said, "Dr. Turnbull said you'd taken a Nembutal."

"I did. A grain and a half."

She frowned. "Do you take it very often?"

I shook my head.



"I can't understand it. You should be sleeping like a log."

"I had a bad dream," I told her.

She stood in thought. "Would you take a cup of hot cocoa?"

"Don't bother." She disregarded that, and went into the kitchen, very much the nurse. I heard cupboard doors opening and shutting. "There's Ovaltine here," she said. "You'd better have a cup of that."

It seemed that I was to have little say in the matter. A hot drink might not be a bad thing, anyway. Presently she came back with two cups and a few biscuits on a plate. We sat waiting for the drink to cool.

"Dr. Turnbull said you'd been a hostess with Captain Pascoe."

"I was in his crew for about ten months, in AusCan."

"How did you come to be in AusCan?"

"I was trained at the Queen Alexandra Hospital, in Melbourne. Then about three years ago I got an itch to go places. AusCan like their senior hostesses to have hospital training. I put in for it and got it. I was with them for a little over a year."

"Get fed up with it?"

"Well—yes. You get it out of your system after a time—just serving meals and drinks. I'm back at the Queen Alexandra. I heard about this on the wireless and thought I'd come over to see him in hospital. I never dreamed there'd be this difficulty in getting him out."

"You're Australian, I suppose?" I asked.

She nodded. "You're English, aren't you?"

"I suppose so. I came out here when I got married, in 1946."

We sat sipping our hot drinks. Presently she said, "There was a Mrs. Forbes in the hotel. Did you meet her?"

"She came here. She seemed rather a queer type."

"I think she's mental," the nurse remarked.

I laughed. "Why do you say that?"

"She was telling everybody that she was his daughter," she said, hotly. "On top of that she was telling everybody not to risk their lives to help him."

"She's his daughter, all right. At least I think she is. He had a wife who divorced him, and there was a daughter."

"That's right," she said slowly. "There was."

I got up, and showed her the picture of Johnnie and Judy in front of the rotary-engined fighter. "I think that was his wife."

She glanced over her shoulder at it; she had evidently seen it before. "That's right. It didn't last long." She paused. "He was so terribly young. Anyway," she remarked with some satisfaction, "Dr. Turnbull tore her off a strip all right at the hotel, in front of everyone. I'd only just arrived; I landed straight into it."

"I didn't think a lot of Turnbull at first," I said. "But he's got any amount of guts."

"I think he's good," she said. "We were talking about the operation, what he's got to do. I've never seen him operate, but I think he'd be very steady. I've seen so many young house surgeons. They seem to get into their stride after they've done a few major operations successfully—if they're the right sort. I'd rather see him operate on Captain Pascoe than that Dr. Parkinson."

I finished my drink. "I'm glad to hear you say that. All we've got to do now is to keep our fingers crossed and hope that I can put you out on the airstrip." I looked out at the weather again. "It's getting finer all the time. Thank God for that. I think I'll go back to bed now."

"Sit down there for a minute while I make your bed. You'll sleep better if I do."

She was very much the nurse, and I sat down obediently in the warm glow of the fire. In the next room I heard her slamming pillows about, and the rustle of sheets. She was an efficient girl, I thought, and we were very fortunate that she had turned up at the right moment. A first-class nurse could almost certainly improve a surgeon's skill by taking all irrelevant responsibilities off his mind. The surgical side of this thing was probably as good now as we could hope to get it.

The girl said, "All ready for you, sir."

I went into the bedroom. The bed was very neat, no wrinkle on the folded sheets or the pillows. It was, in fact, just like being in a hospital because the nurse was waiting there to tuck me up. She took Johnnie Pascoe's dressing-gown as I slipped out of it and hung it up behind the door, folded his bedclothes over me and tucked them in professionally.

"All right now?" she asked.

"Quite all right," I said meekly. "Thank you very much."

She picked up his alarm clock. "I'll take this with me. Just let yourself sleep through. I'll call you when it's time to get up." She turned out the light and went out, closing the door softly behind her.

I lay in the darkness, at ease and comfortable. The hot drink was still warm inside me. There was a gleam or two of moonlight in the room through chinks in the curtains. It might well be sunny at dawn. We had a good young surgeon and a first-class nurse, and everything was going to be all right. I lay drifting into sleep thinking about Johnnie Pascoe, whose pyjamas I was wearing; about Johnnie when he was AusCan's senior pilot, due for retirement before long, and the Australian nurse who had joined his crew as senior air hostess. . . .

CHAPTER 12

Peggy Dawson and I had ten months together in a DC-6B, flying the Pacific route—Vancouver, Honolulu, Fiji and Sydney, Australia. Crews in AusCan are rigorously controlled to prevent pilot fatigue. They fly no more than eight hundred and forty hours in any year; after each twelve hours of flying they have twenty-four hours free of duty. From Honolulu to Nandi Airport in Fiji takes about twelve hours so

that a rest there is obligatory; another eight hours' flying, by a different crew, takes the machine to Sydney.

For ten months I had lived in close association with Peggy Dawson, on the flight deck over the great wastes of the Pacific, in the coco-nut groves and on the coral beaches of Fiji when we were resting as we did for four days out of every week. I had come to know her very well.

She first came to me in the superintendent's office at Vancouver Airport. For three years I had been flying the northern route, Vancouver-Frobisher-London, and I was now to be transferred to the southern route. Nandi would suit me very well for my last year in AusCan; it was warm there, and closer to Tasmania, where I was thinking of retiring.

We were reshuffling the crews and she came in while I was talking to Dick Scott, my new flight engineer. We were taking a machine that had been in the shops for a five-thousand-hour check down to the southern route; the aircraft and engine log-books were on the desk before me, and I told Dick to have a look through them while I talked to the girl.

"Miss Dawson, isn't it?" I said.

"Yes, sir. Peggy Dawson."

There was something vaguely familiar about her. "Sit down," I said. "You've been flying Honolulu-San Francisco-Vancouver with Captain Forrest, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why do you want to get on to the southern route?"

"It's nearer to my home," she said. "I live in Melbourne."

That was reasonable; once in two months a hostess got a week's leave in Canada or in Australia.

"You aren't afraid of being based at Nandi? There's nothing much to do there."

"I'd rather like Fiji for a time," she said.

"If you come on the southern route you'd have to be prepared to stick it for a year," I said.

"I know that," she said.

I had had a good report on her from our chief hostess. "How long were you a junior hostess with Captain Forrest?" I said.

"For four months, ever since I joined the company."

"Well, if you come with me you'll get upgraded. I'll be taking you as senior hostess. Think you can manage it?"

"I'm sure I can, sir."

"All right, you're in."

Two days later we took off from Vancouver for San Francisco and Honolulu, with Peggy Dawson as senior hostess and, as junior hostess, a friend of hers, Mollie Hamilton. We rested for a day at the Beachcomber Hotel in Honolulu, and then took on a full load of passengers non-stop for Nandi. I stayed in my seat till we reached operating altitude and had adjusted for the cruise condition. The weather was clear ahead of us and everything was normal on the flight deck; I handed over to Pat Petersen, my first officer, and went aft into the cabin to see what was going on there.

The passengers were finishing the light meal that we serve after an evening take-off; the girls had taken most of the trays away and were starting to hand out the pillows and blankets. We had tourist passengers in the front part of the cabin, and first-class at the rear. I stopped to chat with a Sikh family, and with a nervous mother with a baby. In the galley everything was reasonably clean considering that trays were still coming in. In the first-class cabin we had a couple of Australian statesmen, a chap from the World Bank and a Swedish pianist. I walked to the rear of the cabin, stopping now and then to talk to somebody, looked into the wash-rooms, and went back to the galley. I said to my senior hostess, "Everything all right?"

"I think so, sir. We've got four sleeping berths to pull down. I'll do those in a minute."

"Would you like Mr. Scott to give you a hand with those?" They were high up, and a heavy job for a girl.

She shook her head. "We can manage them."

"All right." I wondered again where I had seen her before. "Get the lights out when you've got them all settled down, and then call the flight deck. After that, don't switch them on again without permission from the flight deck."

"Very good, sir."

"I like one of you to be awake at night. Take it in turns to sleep."

I went back to my seat at the controls on the flight deck and sent Pat Petersen and Sam Prescott, the navigator, off to get some sleep. I stayed on watch till two o'clock, with the wireless operator and the engineer at their desks behind me, and then sent the wireless operator to call the

others. They came to the flight deck and I handed over, and then went back to the bunks that they had used. To my surprise the hostess was there. "I'm giving you a fresh pillow, sir," she said.

"Service!" I laughed. "I've never had that done for me before."

She said seriously, "Would you like a cup of coffee now before you go to sleep?"

"I don't think so."

"What time will you be getting up?"

"We'll be coming up to Canton Island in a couple of hours. I'll get up then."

She nodded. "I'll bring you a cup of coffee and a biscuit." I saw her go forward and speak to Sam Prescott.

I took off my jacket, loosened my collar and tie, and lay down with my head on the clean pillow. I wondered if this girl was going to be a nuisance. After thirty years of airline flying, the hostess who does everything for an unmarried captain and nothing for the passengers was no novelty to me, though it was some time since I had been plagued by one of those. I smiled. I was probably flattering myself, for I was fifty-nine and due to retire next year.

I slept a little, and then Sam Prescott came to tell me Canton was abeam, about a hundred miles away. I put my jacket on, and went to the navigator's desk with him. Everything was in order. I went the rounds, looked at the radio log, the engineer's log and the charts. I had a word with Pat at the controls, and went aft into the cabin.

In the faint blue night lights, everything was quiet. One or two passengers were reading with their shaded lights, but most were sleeping. I walked down the aisle to the galley. The senior hostess was there. "I was just going to bring you a cup of coffee, sir," she said.

"Thanks. I'll have it here. Everything all right?"

"The baby in Number Seven started crying. We warmed up some milk and gave it a bottle. It's quiet now."

I nodded. "Miss Hamilton asleep?"

"I was letting her sleep till we get busy in the morning," she said.

"You don't want a spell yourself?"

She shook her head. "I'm accustomed to night duty."

I drank my coffee and nibbled a biscuit.

"We've got another five hours to go," I said. "E.T.A. is seven fifteen,

Fiji time. It will be dawn about an hour and a half before that. What about the forms?"

"I gave out the health and immigration cards before they went to sleep," she said. "I'll start collecting them as soon as they wake up."

"Customs declaration?"

"Yes, they've got that, too."

"Let Mr. Prescott have them an hour before landing."

I put down my cup, and went back to the flight deck.

We landed on the long runway among the fields of sugar cane in the warm morning light, and came to rest before the airport buildings. The port officials came on board and cleared us, and the ground hostess took the passengers up to the hotel for breakfast. We walked to the AusCan office, where Jim Hanson was waiting with his crew to take over from us, and commenced the handing over. Half an hour later we were walking towards the AusCan hostel with a Fijian boy wheeling our luggage behind us on a hand truck.

The hostel at Nandi Airport is nothing much to look at, though it is comfortable enough. It consists of a light weatherboard building heavily braced with outside cables against hurricanes. There is a central lounge provided with out-of-date periodicals and a radio; one end is set with tables as a dining-room on the cafeteria system. There is a small bar. A long corridor extends from each end of this lounge to the bedrooms, one side for men, the other for women. The rooms are well designed for the tropics with a good through draught and fans.

Here we settled down to spend our lives for the next year or so. Except when aircraft were delayed, we relieved the crew of the machine coming in from Sydney on Tuesday evening and took off for Honolulu at ten o'clock at night. We got to Honolulu about noon next day, but that was also Tuesday for we crossed the date line. We stayed the night at Honolulu and left for Fiji at nine o'clock in the evening of the following day, arriving back at Nandi at seven o'clock on Friday morning, fairly tired after a long night flight. That was our week's work; Saturday, Sunday and Monday were free. Not a lot of work for people on our salary scale, perhaps, but quite enough if we were to keep on the top line.

One of our duties on the ground was to take plenty of exercise; tennis-courts were provided and considerable pressure was exerted on the crews—largely through the captains—to use them. In a hot, humid place like

Fiji that meant getting in a lather of sweat in the first five minutes, but I played three or four sets a day and made my air crew do the same, girls and men alike. It pays off handsomely; if you keep fit the flying doesn't worry you.

At the airport club there was a swimming-pool to go to after tennis. The crews played a lot of water polo, but it was five years since I had had a game. I was still very fit, but age does tell. I was still a good diver, however, and won a diving competition the second week at Nandi, and I began to have a lot of fun round the reefs with an aqualung outfit. At the age of fifty-nine my chest measurement was still nine inches greater than my waist, and I intended it to stay that way.

The trouble that I had anticipated with my senior hostess didn't develop. Though I still got a clean pillow in the bunk when I lay down and had my desire for a cup of coffee anticipated, I was getting no more attention than the passengers. It was not till we had been operating for about three weeks that I had any real conversation with her.

It was by the pool at the airport club at Nandi. Most of the brightly coloured metal tables and chairs beneath the beach umbrellas were occupied, but she was sitting alone at one, reading a novel. I walked over to her. "Mind if I join you?"

She laid down her book. "Not a bit. I've been admiring your bathing shorts," she said.

I laughed. "They *are* a bit gaudy."

"They're wonderful. Wherever did you get them?"

"Honolulu. There's a place in Kalakaua Avenue." I offered her a cigarette and lit it. "You live in Melbourne, I think you said?"

"Yes, in South Yarra. I went to England once. It was marvellous. I'd have liked to stay there but my grandmother was getting very old, and it wouldn't have been fair."

"Is she your only relation?"

"She was. She died about two years ago, soon after I got back. She brought me up. My mother and father were killed in a car crash. I don't remember them at all. Grandmother left me all her furniture, so I took a couple of rooms in a friend's house as a flat, and I've kept that on."

"That's a good idea. You've always got somewhere to go back to, with your own things and people who know you."

She glanced at me curiously. "Where do you live?"

"Where I work. Here. In London. Montreal. Vancouver."

"You just live in clubs and airport hostels?"

"That's right. When I retire, in about a year, I'm going to have a house for the first time in my life. In Tasmania, I think. I haven't quite decided."

"Are you a Tasmanian?"

"No. I was born in Ontario, and I've still got a sister there, but I haven't seen her for years. I wouldn't want to go back there. I rather like Tasmania. There's a little place called Buxton that I've got my eye on. I've had my fill of seeing the great world."

"Did you ever work in England?"

I nodded. "I was in England in the First War, and I stayed on for twelve years. As a matter of fact, I was based in England all through the Second War, in the Transport Command. Ferrying Liberators over the Atlantic, flying Yorks to Singapore. All sorts of things."

"I did love England," she said. "England in the spring is like fairyland. The primroses, and the bluebells in the woods!"

"Too many people," I remarked. "There's a good bit of England here in Fiji; it's a British colony, of course. Down in Suva everybody seems to be English."

"I'd like to go to Suva. It's silly to be in a country and see nothing but the airport."

"Well," I said, "some of the buses along the coast are good, or Fiji Airways might give you a pass. You've got plenty of time."

"I haven't," she retorted. "You make us play tennis all the time."

I laughed. "I'll accept a certificate from the Governor that you played four sets a day in Suva."

A few days later Charlie Lemaitre was a passenger with us from Honolulu southward. He had been Minister of Transport in Canada off and on for fifteen years, and I had known him as long as that.

Normally, I never invite a passenger to the flight deck; AusCan forbids it and I think it's bad practice. It makes young captains and first officers swollen-headed if they are allowed to bask in the admiration of important people, and swollen heads bring accidents in their train. Mr. Lemaitre was different because he had a pass from the head office and I had him on the flight deck for over an hour after we took off.

When we got to Nandi I took time off to attend to the Lemaitres

myself; they were going on to Suva by Fiji Airways. Mrs. Lemaitre was absurdly grateful for the little things that I did for the Minister. "So very kind of you, Captain Pascoe," she said. "Charlie will be giving a little dinner for some of the government people in the hotel on Monday night. Could you come down to Suva for that, and bring Miss Dawson? She told me that she'd never been to Suva."

This was in the nature of a royal command. The hostess wasn't present so I would have to decide for her.

"That's really very kind of you," I said. "We should like to be there very much."

After they had gone I rang up the office at Suva, and told our manager, Stanley McEwen, about it.

"They asked Miss Dawson, too," I said. "How do you react to that one?"

"If they want her, you'd better bring her down."

"Be all right to charge up her expenses?"

"I suppose so," he said reluctantly. "But keep them down as much as possible. You'd better both spend the night with me."

"Two nights. Give us time to do some shopping."

"All right," he said. "I'll expect you both on Sunday."

That afternoon I played mixed doubles with Mollie Hamilton against Peggy Dawson and Sam Wolfe, our radio operator, and we beat them. Afterwards I called Peggy Dawson over.

"I've got a job for you," I said, and told her about the invitation from the Lemaitres.

She asked, "What sort of a party is it? Long dress?"

"I suppose so. The Governor will probably be there."

"But I've got nothing to wear!"

"That's your problem," I said equably. "All I've contracted to do is to deliver you to the party. The company are paying your expenses."

"Are the company paying for a dress for me?"

"I don't suppose so for a moment," I replied.

She went into a huddle with the other hostesses that night. Lautoka, the second city of Fiji, is fifteen miles from the airport and the Indian tailors and dressmakers there work very quickly. She and another girl spent the day there on Saturday, and I saw her showing the other girls a pastel-green dress that night.

I had found a taxi with an Indian driver to take us to Suva, and we started off on Sunday morning through the fields of sugar cane, and down the coast. Everything was new to her, and the driver stopped once and got her a foot of sugar cane so she could nibble it and see what the children were all chewing.

It was many years since I had been anywhere with a girl, and I was awkward and constrained. I had put away all thoughts of marriage when I went to India in the early thirties. Hostesses on international routes are hand-picked, and in the last twenty years I had been associated in my work with many charming and delightful women. I had never taken one of them out. Now I found that I had lost the knack of entertaining a young woman. I didn't know what would interest her. The brown, dark-eyed children waving to us by the roadside did not excite me particularly, but they were fascinating to her.

"Just look at that little boy with the big tummy!" she exclaimed once. "Isn't he sweet?"

"Looks to me as if he's got something," I remarked, and felt an awful stiff. I should have been able to enter into her mood.

The system of land tenure in Fiji is quite interesting, because the Indian cane farmers rent the land from the Fijians, so that the Fijian has little to do but sit in the sun and scratch. I tried to explain this to her, but couldn't raise her interest, but a Fijian schoolmistress teaching the children to play netball was absorbing to her, and when we passed the village where a British film had been made she got excited. I hadn't seen the picture, so I fell down on that one, too.

I had never thought of myself as an old man when I was dealing with young men; I was just more experienced than they were, less likely to get into a flap in an emergency. It needed a day out with a young woman to drive home the inescapable fact that I was getting old.

I said something of the sort to her when we stopped for lunch at the small hotel in Singatoka, feeling that some apology was necessary. We were sitting over drinks in the lounge that overlooks the river.

"I suppose as you get older your interests change," I said. "I'm much more interested now in finding out what makes this country tick than in the physical side of it. Getting an old man."

She shook her head. "I won't have that."

"I'm fifty-nine. I've got to come off airline work next year."

"Fifty-nine isn't old. I've never met anyone who played a harder game of tennis. You wear us all out."

"You can keep the physical side in order," I remarked. "I'm not so sure about the mental side. One gets to think like an old man. You should have made this trip with someone like Sam Wolfe."

She laughed. "When I want a bit of slap and tickle I'll arrange it for myself, thank you. I'm having a marvellous time just as we are."

We lunched and drove on in the hot afternoon, passing from the sugar-cane country into the coco-nut country. We passed by white coral beaches, dazzling little bays between promontories where coco-nut trees hang slanting forward over the water so that the nuts drop into the sea.

She said once, "Fancy having a beach party at a place like that, and swimming in the lagoon!"

"Sharks," I said.

"Pat Petersen says the sharks don't come inside the reef."

I laughed. "Famous last words." I had met one a few days previously, when I was spear fishing. I had been twenty feet down beside the coral gardens of the reef, and it had come at me from curiosity, I think, a great shadowy thing seven or eight feet long in the pale-green water. I poked it on the nose with the spear gun and it went away, and I got out on to the reef quickly. I told her about this and she was very concerned.

"You oughtn't to take risks like that," she said.

I smiled. "It's a lot of fun. Keeps you young."

Stanley McEwen lived in a fair-sized tropical house one thousand feet up on a hill in Suva. His wife showed us to our bedrooms, and in the evening light we joined them for drinks in their cool, big lounge with the magnificent view overlooking Suva Bay and the mountains to the west. Next morning I got a taxi and drove Peggy to the market in the town. She bought a couple of shell necklaces and bracelets from a Fijian woman, whose husband offered us a drink of kava from a coco-nut shell dipped in a tin basin. We took it for politeness and moved on.

"Tastes like tooth-paste," Peggy said.

"That's paying it a compliment."

We found our way slowly through the little town to the Grand Pacific Hotel, and had lunch there. Sitting over coffee after lunch I asked her, "What would you like to do this afternoon? There's the Suva Botanical Gardens and the Museum."

"I'm not going to wear myself out before this evening. I think we'd be more comfortable back in Mr. McEwen's house, sitting in long chairs looking at the view. And if you say I've got to play tennis, I'll hit you with something."

"You can play six sets tomorrow to make up for it."

"I know what you can do this afternoon," she said.

"What's that?"

"Write a letter to your sister in Hamilton."

I stared at her. "Why on earth should I do that?"

"Tell her about Buxton. I think you're going to find it lonely when you retire to a little place like that. It wouldn't be a bad thing to keep in touch with what people you've got."

I got up. "Wait there," I said. "I'll just see the porter and see if he can whistle up a taxi." I didn't want to carry on that conversation. I had been in airline flying for twenty-seven years. For twenty-seven years I had moved about the world, living in hotels and airport hostels and clubs; I had had men of my own sort to talk to and do things with in all my working and my leisure hours. I was tired of it now, and wanted a house of my own, where I could hang up my photographs and souvenirs, have all my toys out of the boxes and arrange them round me. But deep in my subconscious I had known it would be hellishly lonely, and I had refused to face the fact. Now this girl had put her finger straight on to the weak point of my plan. I wasn't very pleased with her for doing it. When we got up to the McEwens' house I went and lay down on my bed, still deeply troubled.

Charlie Lemaitre's dinner party was quite a formal affair, with the Governor and his lady, eight couples from the government Secretariat, the McEwens, the hostess and me. They had it in one of the cloisters of the hotel, overlooking the gardens and a moonlit sea. The men were in white dinner-jackets and the women in evening dress; the table was lit by candles in glass shades, and there were many white-coated, soft-footed Indian waiters moving about behind us. The food was good and the wine passable, and the whole set-up was very pleasant.

I was talking to a good-looking woman about the spread of the Mormon faith through the South Seas, when I happened to look across the table to where the air hostess was sitting. She was talking to the Director of the Public Works Department, laughing at something he had said.

Something in her attitude rang a bell, and everything clicked into place. I knew now who she had reminded me of. She was like Brenda Marshall.

It was a momentary flash, and then it was gone. She was nothing like Brenda Marshall, really, in hair, face or figure. She was Peggy Dawson, senior hostess in my air crew. It must have been the wine, and I was tired, too, worried about Buxton and loneliness. Loneliness, and the wine; that added up to Brenda Marshall, and it always had done so, for twenty-seven years. I sat there in a morbid reverie, and my charming companion rattled on until, with my absent-minded answers, the conversation flagged, and she turned to her partner on the other side. I roused myself then, and began to talk to the wife of the Colonial Secretary about Fijian art, a subject I knew less than nothing about.

From time to time I stole a glance at Peggy Dawson. I saw no resemblance again to Brenda Marshall. The hostess was a pleasant, competent Australian girl with a marked sense of duty and responsibility. She dressed tidily, but she wasn't particularly glamorous; I felt that I could sense the trained nurse in an evening dress. She was different from the English wives of the colonial officials at the table; she was trying hard, but she had no common background with them, none of the social experience that was their stock-in-trade. Brenda Marshall could have held her place in this colonial society with no effort at all.

The dinner party came to an end at about ten thirty. We strolled about in little groups on the moonlit lawn until the Governor and Lady Norman said good-bye. The McEwens drove us back up to their house and we had a nightcap, and then went to bed.

I stood at my bedroom window for a time, looking out over the mountains. I was still a little upset at the reminder of Brenda Marshall. Tenuous and unsubstantial, the resemblance would not be put aside. After my brief marriage I had led rather a solitary life till Brenda had burst on me for a brief year of glory, and for the first time I had known what it was to have somebody really care about me, care whether I lived or died. The resemblance here was the resemblance of really caring for my welfare. After twenty-seven years it came as a bit of a shock. Quite unsought, without any conscious effort on my part, it looked as though that fortune was being given to me again.

I stood looking over Suva Bay in the moonlight. All this had begun

on that first evening when she had put the clean pillow for me in the crew's berth; it had gone on unobtrusively all the time. Someone must have influenced the cooks in the AusCan hostel to bring my breakfast egg and bacon to the table as I like it, fried on both sides. In the first week half my laundry was lost. I had given up the struggle to find the stuff and had bought more in Honolulu, but since then it had returned punctually with nothing ever missing. It's not the sort of thing that happens on its own at Nandi Airport. For the first few days I had had one of the dumbest girls in Fiji to do my room, a very jungly type. The head girl had succeeded her, a quick and intelligent part-European, and I had done nothing to arrange the switch. Who had done that for me? And then, on top of everything, had come that very penetrating remark about my being lonely when I went to Buxton.

I couldn't feel that Peggy Dawson was "setting her cap at me," as my grandmother used to say. I have had that one before, of course, and seen it happen many, many times in twenty-seven years of airline flying. A hostess spends time on her hair and face and eyelashes before coming to the flight deck, then she comes with tinkling vivacity until I slam her down. She dresses, off duty, better than her pay would permit; she starts to use scent and to stimulate gay parties. One cannot blame her if she does what every human being does at one time or another; one has to grin and bear it and see that the work is done correctly.

This time, however, there were none of the usual symptoms. Peggy Dawson was just a very decent girl and a good senior hostess, who took it to be one of her duties to see that her captain was made comfortable. But what a wife she'd make for somebody, some day! I hoped that didn't happen before my time was up with AusCan. I didn't want the jungly girl doing my room again, putting the wet soap in my handkerchief drawer and my clean shoes on the floor of the shower.

CHAPTER 13

WE WENT back to Nandi next morning, played a little tennis, and took the machine on to Honolulu that evening. Our lives slipped back into the normal groove for several weeks.

I took my leave and went to Buxton to have a look round, and stayed at the hotel, which was horrible. It wasn't a bad little town, however,

with good trout streams within thirty miles or so. The airport was a grass field of about five hundred acres that had been laid out for training in the last war and not much used since; it was grazed by sheep and the farmer had the one small hangar full of hay-making machinery. A bit of money wanted spending before it could be used for aeroplanes, but the Shire Clerk told me they would do that if I took it on a five years' lease.

There seemed to be some charter and instruction work available and several of the mountain graziers wanted superphosphate spread from the air. If I went there I would never make much more than a bare living but on the other hand I wouldn't have to work very hard. I met most of the locals in the four days I was there and thought them a decent crowd. I told them I'd decide within the next few months whether I wanted to lease the hangar, but when I left I had practically made up my mind.

A fortnight later I was standing on the corner of Beach Walk and Kalakaua in Waikiki, waiting to cross the road, when Peggy Dawson came along, and I greeted her. "Where are you off to?"

"I was going back to the hotel," she said. "But now—could you let me have some dollars?"

"Why, certainly," I said. On the Pacific route Canadians were paid in dollars and Australians in pounds.

"Could you let me have thirty?" she asked. "I'll give you the pounds back at the hotel. I want to get a dress."

I gave her the money. "Nice dress?"

"It's a beaut. Would you like to see it before I buy it?"

We turned and walked along the pavement in the warm sun, till we saw her dress on a dummy in a shop window.

It was a sort of mottled pastel-blue colour, with trimmings of a darker blue. It was too old for her; it seemed to me to be a dress for a woman of fifty, but she was so pleased with it that I didn't say so. "I think you'd look very nice in it," I said.

"I think it's lovely. I don't like things too bright." We went together into the shop and she set about buying it.

"Let's go and have lunch somewhere," I said.

She smiled. "I'd like that."

We went to the Edgewater Hotel terrace overlooking the blue swimming-pool, and had soft drinks full of fruit and ice before lunch. We

had to fly that night, and we don't drink the day we fly. "How did you get on at Buxton?" she asked me.

"All right," I told her. "I shan't get fat there, but there'll be something to do every day. I've got enough saved up for two or three small aircraft and a house."

"What about furniture?" she asked.

"I'll have to get that. But I shan't need much."

"Who's going to cook your meals, and that sort of thing?"

I laughed. "I haven't got as far as that yet."

The waitress brought our lunch.

"I suppose there'll be a switch round of air crew when you leave us," the hostess remarked.

"I suppose there will," I said. "I know Pat Petersen would rather be on the northern route because of his wife—she gets prickly heat. Mollie Hamilton's getting married to that chap in Mobilgas, and Wolfe's got a girl in San Francisco. Looks like a general post after Christmas."

"I don't believe I'll stay on when that happens."

I glanced at her. "Getting tired of it?"

"Not exactly. It's a lovely life, but one sometimes feels it isn't really important—not like nursing. I'd like to try orthopaedic work. Polio children."

The blue, brilliant swimming-pool lay before us, with the superbly healthy young Americans in and out of it in the bright sunshine. "Kind of an antidote to this," I said.

She smiled. "I wouldn't want this to be any other way. But after all, it's work like that that makes this possible—getting crooked kids straight."

"I know what you mean," I said. None of the hostesses who came to us from hospital work stayed longer than a year or two; because they were hand-picked for their qualities of character the hospitals drew them back.

I glanced at her, smiling. "Marriage doesn't come into your programme at all?"

"Not yet, anyway."

"You don't want to leave it too long," I remarked. "Everybody ought to be married."

"You're a fine one to be talking like that," she retorted.

I glanced at her. "I was married once."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't know."

"Nothing for you to be sorry about," I replied. "I was married in the First World War, very nearly forty years ago."

"What happened?"

"She divorced me. She was an actress—Judy Lester. She was quite well known. I had rather a dud job in England after the war and she got a film contract in Hollywood. She divorced me from there."

"Why did she do that? Or is it a rude question?"

"Not a bit. She wanted to marry a band leader in Hollywood. She got it for desertion."

"I don't understand. Who deserted who?"

I smiled. "I deserted her, because I wouldn't go to Hollywood. We had a daughter, but her mother took her with her to America."

"You didn't keep in touch?"

"I was a bit sore, and I hadn't any money to go to America. It was twenty years before I got there, in the Second War, and then I didn't feel like digging it all up again."

She nodded slowly. "The girl must have been grown up."

"That's right. It's better to leave it be when it's like that."

It was many, many years since I had talked to anyone about my marriage. This girl was easy to talk to, like Brenda Marshall. There are some people that you don't mind telling about painful things, but they don't come very often.

That lunch set a pattern for many others. We fell into a habit of strolling out together on our mornings in Honolulu after a late, lazy breakfast, to look at the yachts and the sampan fishing boats in the harbour, or the shops of Honolulu or Waikiki. Once or twice we went to a concert; several times I got a drive-yourself car, and we explored the main island. I came to look forward to these outings very much. I think she did, too.

I never made love to Peggy, but a very close companionship grew up between us. I never told her about Brenda Marshall; that lay too deep; but within a couple of months she must have learned practically everything else about me. In return, I learned a good deal about her.

Her life had been a simple melody of Melbourne and her grandmother, school, visits to the Australian seaside, cheerful comradeship within the

hospital, the great adventure of her trip to England. She never told me anything about her love affairs, however; like me, she had her reticences.

Although we didn't see much of each other at Nandi apart from the work and the tennis-court, which after all was just another kind of work, she was never much out of my mind. As soon as we had landed and rested on Friday mornings, I found myself planning things that we could do together the following week in Honolulu. Very soon, of course, I got wise to myself. I was a silly old fool, for I was coming very close to falling in love with a girl less than half my age. No future in that, I told myself.

I tried to take a grip on myself but it wasn't easy. One morning at Honolulu I told her at breakfast that I had to go down to the maintenance base at the airport, and I didn't know how long I'd be; she'd better not wait for me. She was obviously disappointed, which didn't make it any easier, and I drove down to the base angry with myself for hurting her. I milled round there for an hour and asked a lot of damfool questions till I thought she would have gone out, and then went back to the hotel. I found her sitting disconsolately in the lounge reading a copy of *Time*, terribly pleased to see me. I backslid then, of course. We drove out to Kualoa for lunch, and had a grand time.

October came, and towards the end of the month I went on a week's leave to Buxton and put up at the hotel. It was spring in northern Tasmania and the country was very lovely, fresh and cool and sunny after the hot humidity of Fiji, with wattles in bloom and everybody going trout fishing. I signed a lease for the hangar and the flying rights on the airport, the latter based on a small percentage of my turnover.

Then I set myself to organize a house. I bought a site nearest the hangar, and visited the local builder. I wanted to buy three aeroplanes, tools, spares and a second-hand car; there wouldn't be a great deal of money left for a house. The builder had a book of designs and I signed a contract for a small house that was within my price bracket.

Without admitting to myself why I was making the alterations, I decided on meals in the kitchen as a regular thing, cut the sitting-room down in size, and doubled the size of the main bedroom. That made a reasonable house for an elderly bachelor.

A weatherboard house goes up very quickly, and the builder was confident that he could get it finished by January 31 when I left AusCan.

I took a photograph of the plan so that I could think it over at Nandi, and fixed with him that I would come on leave again about the end of December, and settle details of the fixtures and the decoration.

I had the afternoon to spare before the bus left for Hobart at four o'clock. I wandered round the airfield with my camera snapping everything in the neighbourhood. Next week when I was in Honolulu I would want to tell Peggy Dawson all about it, and with the photographs she should be able to get a good idea how I was going to live.

I went to Hobart and looked at furniture, and to Melbourne to see about purchasing planes. Then I took a tram out to South Yarra, and walked round in the warm night, trying to visualize what her life had been among these quiet streets and houses. I found the house in which she had her flat, and stood in the lamplit road looking at it for ten minutes. I was a silly old fool, of course. I asked my way to the Queen Alexandra Hospital and had a look at the outside of that, too.

Next morning I flew to Sydney on the eight-o'clock service of Australian Continental Airways. I saw a list of the air crew posted on the door into the flight deck, and the captain was Ronnie Clarke, whom I had taught to fly at Leacaster so many years ago, in that wonderful year. I had been very happy then, and I was happy now, and here was Ronnie Clarke again. When we were climbing on course, I asked one of the hostesses to tell the captain that Johnnie Pascoe was on board. She came back at once with an invitation for me to go up forward. Ronnie made his second pilot get out of his seat, and I settled down by my old pupil. I was glad to see Ronnie again. He had been a commercial pilot practically all the time since I taught him to fly, except when he was in the R.A.F.; I remembered flying him home from Burma in 1944. I told him about my coming retirement at Buxton. "Like going back to Duffington again," he said.

"That's right," I replied shortly. I hoped it wasn't going to be like going back to Duffington again.

We both had about three hours to kill at Sydney and he asked me to come up to the pilots' room at the airport. I always liked Ronnie, and now he was one of the oldest friends I had. I wondered how much he knew about my love for Brenda Marshall. I had an idea that he probably knew quite a lot, partly because in all the years I had known him he had never spoken of her.

I had coffee and sandwiches with him and we glanced over the morning papers. There was a case going on in England against an unmarried girl. She had borne an illegitimate baby. Wanting to get rid of it, she had left it on the steps of a foundling hospital in the traditional style; she had done it at night to escape attention. It snowed in the early hours and then froze hard; when they found the baby in the morning it was dead from exposure. They were trying the girl for murder.

"Looks like they'll pin it on her," Ronnie said. "But she'll get a reprieve."

"I hope she doesn't," I said bitterly. "I hope she hangs." It ought to have been me, of course, and I should have hanged, too, for I had gone to India.

"That seems a bit severe," he said mildly.

I threw down the paper, for it had upset me. When you do a thing like that it's done for ever, and you can't undo it. You've got to live with your guilt for the rest of your life, even if no one ever knows.

"Illegitimate kids have a hard enough row to hoe," I said vehemently, "without being chucked away in the gutter because their parents don't want them. I hope they throw the book at that girl." As they should have thrown the book at me.

If Ronnie Clarke knew about Brenda and myself I had probably told him a bit more, but I didn't really care. There are some things that a friend ought to know.

I left him presently, and went to the AusCan office. We landed at Nandi about ten o'clock that night, and I was very glad to be there. I walked from the terminal buildings up to the hostel. The light was on in her room and I thought perhaps she might come out and talk to me, so I went and had a whisky at the bar, but she didn't appear.

I showed my photographs to her the following week, sitting on the terrace of the Edgewater Hotel. She was very interested and examined each one closely. "It's a pretty little place," she said. "What do they do there?"

"They farm," I told her. "Mostly sheep and beef cattle."

"What happens if you get ill? Is there a doctor there?"

"There isn't yet, but they say that there's one coming. Anyway, I don't intend to get ill."

"You've got it all worked out," she said. "You're going to get the sort

of retirement that will suit you best. It's going to be lonely for you, just at first, but you'd never be really happy away from flying, would you?"

"I don't think I would," I replied.

She went on leave soon after I got back, and when she was away I had time to think things over. She was right in saying I would be lonely when I went to Buxton, but not the way she meant. I wasn't afraid of being lonely for the company of men. In the bar or the golf club I got on all right. But when I left AusCan a close friendship that I had grown to depend on would be interrupted, probably for good. I should be lonely, very lonely indeed, for her.

In that week I faced up to what would happen if I asked her to marry me. I knew it was a silly thing to do at my age, and I knew that she would probably laugh it off. Yet if I didn't do it, I would kick myself for a fool that I hadn't reached out to take the love she might have offered me.

By the end of the week I had come to the conclusion that I must try my luck. If she accepted me it would be an unusual marriage, but there was no earthly reason why it shouldn't turn out very happily for both of us. I would do it about Christmas time. That would leave a month before I retired from AusCan and my crew broke up. It would give her time to make up her mind before we had to separate.

She came back from her leave and we went on doing things together in Honolulu every week. But it wasn't quite the same, because now there were circumstances I couldn't discuss with her; I was conscious of evasions and constraints. There was no doubt that our relationship was changing. Once or twice I caught her looking at me with a sort of wonder.

The weather in Fiji got very hot and sticky in December and it rained almost every day. Our day in Honolulu was a real relief. At Nandi I cut down the tennis; three sets was trying for the men and altogether too much for the girls. Instead, I made them all go swimming at Saweni beach, and when they got there I made sure that they *did* swim, reasonably long distances. I wasn't going to have them all getting pot-bellied just because it was the monsoon season.

Saweni is a lovely landlocked bay. It has a long, gently shelving coral beach that runs down into clear, calm water; coco-nut trees lean over the sea. On week-days there is seldom anyone there but the air crews.

We landed in from Honolulu one Friday morning just before Christmas. It had been a tiring and a troublesome flight through monsoon weather almost all the way from Canton Island. The thunderheads were up to forty thousand feet so we had to go through the stuff. I had to reduce speed to under two hundred knots in the turbulence, and once I went down as low as three thousand feet in an attempt to get through underneath it. There was never any danger, but a lot of the passengers were sick and the hostesses had a busy time.

Nobody got any sleep that night, and when we came to Nandi it was in a cloudburst. The Control kept us in the holding position for a quarter of an hour, and when we finally put down we had been in the air for nearly fifteen hours.

It was like a Turkish bath out on the tarmac. We were all tired but not unreasonably so, because that's what the tennis is for. The girls had had the worst of it, and they were looking white and strained. When we had cleared and handed over to the fresh crew in the office I told them we'd all go down to Saweni beach at three o'clock if it cleared.

I walked up to the hostel with my senior hostess. It was hot and steamy, but the frangipane was fragrant in the rain.

"Get a bit of sleep and a swim," I said. "And then would you like to stay down on the beach this evening if it's fine, and have a supper picnic?"

"Not everyone? Just us?"

"That's right," I said. "I'll get the cook to make us up a supper. Something cold and light, like crayfish salad."

She smiled. "That'd be marvellous."

It was lovely on the beach that evening. The clouds had cleared away and the sun set in a clear sky. The crew went back to Nandi in the station wagon and we stayed on the beach, alone but for another party a couple of hundred yards away. We sat on the white, coarse sand in our bathing things luxuriating in the coolness and the beauty, enjoying the little whispers of warm wind about our bodies after the strain and effort of the night. I undid our supper and a bottle of chilled hock, wrapped in a wet cloth, and we ate together in the fading light. A coco-nut fell once with a plump on to the sand only a few yards away from us, and a little Fijian girl appeared out of the shadows of the bush, and smiled at us, and carried it away.



Presently I started in to say my piece. "There's something that I wanted to say to you," I told her. "But I don't know if you'll want to hear it."

"What's that Johnnie?" she asked quietly.

"It was just a crazy idea I had. We get on so well together that I'm going to miss you terribly when we have to break it up. I was wondering if you could ever bring yourself to think of marrying me."

She was silent.

I reached out and took her hand. "It's a May and December sort of a proposal," I said. "People will laugh at you if you accept it. But I do love you very truly, Peggy, and I think I could give you a happy life." I paused. "I suppose I'm doing this very badly. I don't do it every tick of the clock."



She sat motionless. At last she said, "How often have you done it, Johnnie?"

"You mean in my whole life?"

She nodded.

"Twice," I said. "Only twice."

"Was one of them Brenda Marshall?"

I stared at her, amazed. "Who told you about her?"

"Was it?" she asked gently.

"Yes," I replied. "Brenda was the last one. But that was a long time ago."

"I know," she said. We sat silent together on the warm sand in the fading light. At last she said, "I've been playing a trick on you, Johnnie, and I'm feeling very badly about it. I want

you to try and forgive me." She hesitated, and then said, "It's been wonderful to hear you say this. How wonderful, you just don't know. But I couldn't marry you."

"That's all right," I said. "It was just a silly idea I had."

"It's not that, Johnnie. It's not that at all." She paused, and then she said, "You see, if everybody had their rights, I should be Brenda Pascoe."

CHAPTER 14

I STARED at her. "I'm sorry, but I don't get that," I said.

"My names are Brenda Margaret. That's how my birth was registered, at Cannes. Grannie always called me Peggy. I don't think I ever did get christened properly. There was some trouble about it."

"Let me get this straight. Are you trying to tell me that you're Brenda Marshall's daughter?"

"That's right, Johnnie. I'm Brenda Marshall's daughter, and yours."

"What was your grandmother's name?"

"Duclos," she said. "She was married twice. Her first husband was my grandfather, Henry Dawson."

"But Brenda's baby died!"

"She didn't, Johnnie. She grew up a very ordinary child, and finished up as an air hostess in her father's crew."

I sat back and stared out over the dark sea. I had made the most colossal fool of myself, and I needed a little time to recover from what this girl had done to me.

Presently she said in a low tone, "Don't be angry."

"I'm not angry. But Mrs. Duclos wrote to me from Cannes. She said the baby died there."

"I know. She did what she thought was the right thing."

"Why did she tell me that?" I asked resentfully.

"I'm not sure that I know the whole story," she said. "Probably you know the bits I don't. My mother committed suicide, didn't she?"

"I think she did," I said painfully. "She spun her Moth into the deck at Duffington."

"Why did she do that, Johnnie?"

Even with this girl it was difficult to talk of the bad time. "Her husband got out of an asylum," I said at last. "He was coming home to live with her in a few days. He was a mental case, and she was in love with me."

"Is that why Grannie took me back to Cannes?"

"That's right," I said. "She left directly the funeral was over. She was afraid that Derek Marshall might claim you and take you away, or do you an injury."

"When did you go to India?"

"Almost at once," I said. "I had to get away from Duffington, and Imperial Airways wanted pilots for the Far East. I stopped in Cannes on the way out and spent a day with Mrs. Duclos, and saw the baby."

"Me," she said.

"There wasn't anything that I could do. Your grandmother had enough money and everything was under control. Legally, I couldn't

have interfered if I'd wanted. Everything was going on all right."

"You mean, I wasn't legally your child?"

I nodded. "Legally, you hadn't got a father."

She smiled gently. "And now I've found one, he doesn't care about me much."

"That's not true," I said. "I always cared about you. You were Brenda's child."

We sat together in silence on the beach. A moon was coming up in the palm trees behind us, and the point of land a mile away was bathed in light. We sat in the half-light, each busy with our own thoughts. It was true what I had said; away in the heat and dust of Delhi, I had loved that child.

Presently she asked, "How did you get on with Grannie?"

"We never quarrelled, but she never liked me much. You see, it was because of me that it all happened. It was really because of me that Brenda died." •

"Oh, I see," she breathed. "That does explain a lot."

"What does it explain?"

"Why she invented this story that I died. It seemed a bit hard on you, if you *had* minded. I asked her that once, and she said it would have been a relief to you; it was the best thing, if you married, not to have an illegitimate child round your neck."

"When did you first know that you'd got a father living?"

"She told me everything when I was twenty-one. I was training at the Alexandra then. She had told me that my father and mother were killed in a car accident. I knew that wasn't right, because whenever I asked her about my parents she told me something different—she was getting old, you see. At last I knew I must be illegitimate." She paused. "It wasn't very happy, in my school days. Tell me, Johnnie, did you know my mother's maiden name was Dawson?"

I shook my head. "It never occurred to me to question that it was Duclos."

"That's what Grannie said. She said you never knew my mother was her child by her first marriage. When my mother registered my birth at Cannes, she registered it in her maiden name as illegitimate, and there was a note of her married name."

"I never saw the entry. When did you go to Australia?"

"Grannie took me there from Cannes. She had relations there."

"How did you come to be here?"

"I was curious," she said simply, "about you. Grannie hadn't kept in touch with you, but she thought you might still be alive. As soon as I was qualified, I went to England."

"To look for me?"

"Partly," she said. "Only partly. Try and understand, Johnnie. I wanted to know how I'd been born, what really happened."

She stared out over the sea. "What Grannie told me was such a confused story. It could have been wonderfully good, or it could have been—just smutty."

"It was wonderfully good," I said. "Good enough to keep me single all these years. But finish your story now. What did you find out in England?"

"Well, I went to see the Marshalls up at Halifax. George Marshall died about ten years ago. His son, John, knew hardly anything. His uncle, Derek, had blown his brains out with a shot-gun soon after we got to Australia. That must have been while you were in India."

"I heard that," I said.

"I was just one of a whole lot of unsavoury scandals that the Marshalls wanted to forget. John Marshall didn't even introduce me to his family."

"I'm very sorry."

"I hadn't expected much else," she said quietly. "So then I went to Duffington."

"You went there?"

She nodded. "That was no good either. There's no flying club there now. It's got runways about two miles long, and the American Air Force are there."

"What did you do then?"

"I went to the Royal Aero Club in London. The secretary told me to go to a library and look you up in *Who's Who in Aviation*. So I did, and found that you were with AusCan."

Up the beach three Fijians had launched a boat. They came paddling slowly down the shore in the darkness with a brilliant acetylene lamp hanging on a pole over the bows, spearing fish as they came to the light. We watched them as they crept along. London seemed very far away.

"I went to the AusCan office in Piccadilly and got a time-table," she

went on. "I asked the girl who gave it me if Captain Pascoe was still flying for them, and she knew all about you. She said you were in London every week, because you brought the machine in from Vancouver over the North Pole and took it back again. She said you were training younger captains on the route."

I grinned. "She told you a damn sight too much. Bloody gossip."

There was a lot of excited chatter from the boat because one of the men had speared a fish—quite a big one. We sat looking at the spectacle; then as the boat moved on we came back to our conversation.

"Is that when you decided to become a hostess?" I asked.

"Not quite. I went to London Airport a couple of days later and stood in the public enclosure to see the AusCan machine come in from Vancouver. Before it landed, I asked at the office who the captain was, and they told me it was you. When the machine came in, you came off with the other officers. You passed quite close to me. I thought you looked very strict, but rather nice."

I didn't like the very strict part much, but it was probably justified. "I may have been tired," I said. "It's a long flight from Vancouver."

She nodded. "I went to bed much happier that night."

I was glad of that, but I didn't know how to say it. "Then did you go back to Australia?"

She smiled. "I flew back with you."

"Flew back with *me*?" I was dumbfounded.

"I wanted to know what sort of a person you were. You came down the cabin once and asked me if I was comfortable, and told me when we'd be landing. That was the first time I ever spoke to you."

I sat trying to recollect that flight. "When I took you on as hostess, I thought I'd seen you before."

"After you handed over at Vancouver, the idea came to me. I talked to the senior hostess about hostess work. When I told her about my nursing experience, she said that I could get to be a hostess on this line quite easily. I thought if I could be in your air crew I could really get to know about you. I wanted to find out everything I could about you and then make up my mind whether I'd tell you who I was, or not." She paused. "I couldn't do it while Grannie was alive. It wouldn't have been fair to leave her. But when she died I was free to do whatever I wanted to. And what I wanted to do was—this."

We sat together in silence on the beach in the warm night. I was thinking how much I had missed in all these years. Yet Mrs. Duclos had done a good job of bringing her up, and I was grateful to her. For better or worse, I had an adult daughter ready-made. I should never, perhaps, be very close to her for I had seen nothing of her childhood. Perhaps I should never really understand her, as perhaps I had never really understood her mother.

She said gently, "Will you tell me about my mother?"

"I only know it from my side, of course," I said. "We fell in love, but there was more to it than that on her side, much, much more. I never got to understand her side of it, not properly. We wanted to get married. But we never had more than a day or so together. She did things that I never really understood, because I never had the chance to get to understand *her*." I paused. "We were just in love."

"Tell me what actually happened," she said quietly. "Perhaps I'll understand better than you."

I must have talked to her for well over an hour on that calm beach. At last I came to the final scene when she had spun into the deck. "She was still alive when we got her on the stretcher," I said painfully. "But she wasn't conscious."

"You were with her, Johnnie?"

"All the time."

"She chose to die," Peggy said, "rather than go away and live with you, unmarried? Even with me?"

"I think she did," I said. "She left a note about you for her mother."

"I've seen it," she said gently.

It had grown cooler and we had pulled shirts over our bare shoulders while I had been talking of those far-off, painful days in England. The moon had worked round, and we were now sitting in the silvery light on the white sand. I glanced at my wrist-watch, and it was after midnight.

"Time we went back to the hostel," I said.

"There's one more thing I want to say before we go. I told you I'd been playing a sort of trick on you. I want you to try and understand why I did it."

"Well, you might have given me a hint," I said.

She sat staring at the distant, moonlit point. "I wanted to be friends

with you before I told you who I was," she said. "I wanted you to know everything about me, too, before I told you. Then, when I realized what was happening, I didn't know what to do. Tell me. Am I like my mother?"

"Just once or twice, I've thought that you *were* her. Not in appearance, but in character—I think you're very like her."

"Did you know I looked like you?"

I laughed. "No, I didn't. Do you?"

"Mollie Hamilton says so. There's been quite a bit of gossip since we started going about together in Honolulu."

"Better not let me hear them at it. It's probably a good thing I'm retiring. Make any trouble for you?"

"No. If they've been saying I'm your daughter, I'm proud of it. They're all so sorry to see you go." She turned to me. "I should have stopped seeing you so much. I could have done it. But I knew there must be a good deal of my mother in me; that you were falling in love again with what was in me of my mother. I couldn't resist letting it happen, Johnnie. Because, you see, it was the final, absolute proof that everything was quite all right when I was born—but for bad luck."

"Bad luck or bad management," I said slowly.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I've had a long time to think this over," I said. "When you want something that doesn't belong to you so badly that you just take it—well, that's stealing. You don't let yourself get into that state of mind with money or cars or gold cigarette-cases. And you mustn't do it with love. It's stealing, just the same. That's what we didn't understand."

I paused. "I think your mother understood it a bit better than I did. We kidded ourselves that love was different, because it says so in the pop tunes."

"If you hadn't kidded yourselves, I shouldn't be here."

"That's true. Are you glad or sorry?"

"Glad," she said. "Very, very glad."

I got to my feet, stiff after sitting so long. "Time we were going back," I said. "If we stay much longer I'll have to write a confidential note about you to Mrs. Deakin—staying out too late on the beach with men."

She stretched out her hand and I pulled her up beside me. We gathered our things up from the beach. "When you're at Buxton and I'm back at

the Alexandra, we shan't be far from each other. I'll come over and see you. I've been so happy tonight. Everything's right now, isn't it?"

"Yes, everything's come good at last."

We walked slowly from the moonlit coral beach into the deep shadows of the palm-tree groves. Our feet made no sound on the ground; we were gliding along as if suspended in the air, floating along. Everything had come good at last, after so many years. I had reached the happy ending of the story, and I was quietly, serenely happy. In the soft, velvety darkness I lay at peace for I had finished with all heartaches, with all worries; nothing could touch me. Everything was all right now. . . .

CHAPTER 15

THERE WAS light all round me, and she was by my side. She was dressed in ski-ing clothes, stifling in Fiji. I blinked my eyes and muttered, "You'll be much too hot."

She glanced at me curiously. "It's five o'clock, sir. There's a cup of tea here." She put it down on the table beside the lamp that she had switched on. "Would you like bacon and eggs?"

I rubbed my hand over my eyes. I had been dreaming. This was Johnnie Pascoe's room and I was in his bed, in his pyjamas. I was Ronnie Clarke, and I had work to do for him. I rose on one elbow. "What's the weather like?"

She crossed to the window and pulled up the blind. It was dark outside. "The sky is clear," she said. "It's all starry, the wind has dropped a lot."

I was still happy, and this confirmed my happiness, for everything was going to be all right this time.

"How did you sleep?" she asked.

"Never better," I said. I was Ronnie Clarke, and she had made me a hot drink in the middle of the night. "Thanks to your Ovaltine."

She smiled. "How many eggs?"

She was the nurse, and she had been a hostess with AusCan. I was awake now. "Not bacon. I'd like a couple of lightly boiled eggs and some toast."

"I'll have it ready by the time you're dressed," she said, and went out of the room.

I got up in the chilly, Spartan bedroom, and put on Johnnie Pascoe's dressing-gown and slippers. I went to the window and looked out. There was not a scrap of cloud in sight. A high had come along that the Met had not been able to forecast. *Everything was going to be all right. . . .*

The doctor came while I was finishing breakfast with the nurse at the kitchen table. As I got up we heard the Auster being run up at the hangar; everything was under control now. Everything was going to be all right this time.

It was cold and frosty outside with the extra bit of chill that comes before the dawn. At the hangar Billy Monkhouse was sitting in the Auster; four equal blue flames streamed from the exhausts beneath the engine cowling. The two boys were at the tail plane, their clothes blown and buffeted by the slip stream.

I led the doctor and the nurse behind the hangar, a little out of the noise.

"Now look," I said. "This wind's not very strong. If it's like this when we get down to the Lewis River we may be in trouble again. It may be too strong for me to land on that strip cross wind, and not quite strong enough for me to hold her stationary across it. In that case I'd be moving forward ten or fifteen miles an hour, and you'd have to get out damn quick."

The doctor nodded. "I could pretty well fall out."

"That's what I'd want you to do. I'd want you to fall flat on the ground, so that the tail plane passed over you. It would be like getting off a tram going a good bat."

"Fall limp, and try to guard one's head," he said. "I'll do my best. If I think there's not a hope that I'd get up without broken bones, then I won't do it. No use loading up the woman with another patient."

"Fair enough," I said. I turned to the nurse. "Sister Dawson, I'll have you in the back seat, and the doctor beside me. If he makes it, we'll go up again a few hundred feet, and you get out of the back seat and sit beside me. Then we come in again when you're quite ready. If it looks too difficult, or if the doctor has a very rough landing, I won't ask you to jump."

She said, "If the doctor jumps, I jump."

There was a sudden resemblance to Johnnie Pascoe in the set of her chin. "All right," I said. "I'll tell you when I'm going as slowly as I can,

and then you decide for yourself. Before we take off, I want you to practise getting out."

The roar of the engine slowed to a tick-over and then stopped as the engineer switched off. We walked round the hangar. Billy Monkhouse was getting out of the cabin.

"Morning," he said. "She's all ready. I got flares laid down on the airfield."

"Thanks. How much petrol did you use running up?"

"Gallon. Maybe a gallon and a half."

"Get a can and top her up," I said.

I put the nurse in the back seat, and got into the front. I made her practise climbing over into the front seat, and then getting out of the machine. The doctor helped her. "Right foot out on the step. Swing round. Hold the door frame—*there*, and the seat—*there*. Change feet. Now, left foot on the step, swing round and face forward. That's right. Now, jump and let yourself fall limp on your right side. That's fine."

I watched this in deep concern. It looked horrible, but they were both quite prepared to do it. The final decision lay with me, however, only if I put the aircraft on the little runway could they do this thing. Mine was the responsibility, and mine alone. The feeling was still strong in me, however *everything was going to be all right*.

The extra petrol was put in, and we were ready to start. A pale tinge was showing in the black sky over to the east. "Okay," I said. "Let's go." They got into their seats, and I got into mine, shutting my door beside me. Billy Monkhouse drove out to light the flares. When the first flare flamed up we took off.

As we gained altitude the grey light to the east increased and I could see the line of mountains stretching out ahead in a clear sky. I could go over everything this time, and there would be no creeping round the coast in the grey muck.

I kept her on a steady climb up to about five thousand feet. It was terribly cold at that height without the door on the starboard side, and the wind beat and whistled round us. There was no icing on the aircraft for there were no clouds, but ice formed from my breath on the muffler round my throat and on my eyebrows. I became seriously concerned about this jumping out if my passengers were frozen stiff with cold; as soon as possible I must get down to a lower altitude and give them a

chance to thaw out. Yet we must take the most direct course lest we should be in trouble over petrol.

I compromised, deviated slightly to the west and began to let down before we got to Macquarie Harbour, scraping the bush-covered hills with only a hundred feet to spare. It was daylight by the time we passed over the east end of the harbour and the mountains were high above us on our port hand; we were down to two thousand feet and it was getting warmer. I headed for the coast, and checked her at a thousand feet.

Presently I saw the Lewis River and the house. When we were a mile from the house I saw the woman come out of the door and look towards us; she went back, and came out again carrying the wind-sock, and I was grateful for that. She hurried with it up the hill to that desperate little airstrip, and as I turned on a circuit she hoisted it, and it hung limp along the spar. There was no wind at all.

I stared at it incredulous. Then I turned to my passengers, elated.

"Money for jam," I said. "I'll make one dummy run, and if it looks all right I'll land."

The sun was coming up over the mountains as I turned on to the final leg. The only problem now lay in coming in slow enough to put the wheels down within a few feet of the near end of that short strip. I lined up on the strip to come in for my dummy run, throttled back a bit, and put my hand up to pull down half-flap. I brought her in on the throttle, watching it ahead of me. There was a stunted tree with a bush beside it about seventy yards from the end of the strip; if I pulled down full-flap there when I was about six feet up, ready to catch her with a burst of throttle, I should just about make it. I shot a quick glance at the wind-sock to make sure there was no sudden gust of wind.

There was something funny there. The sock was only half-way up the mast. The woman was standing by the mast and waving both arms horizontally.

I moved the throttle forward. We passed over the strip twenty feet up as I gently raised the flaps. I said to the doctor, "See that?"

"It was at half-mast, wasn't it? Was she trying to tell us not to land?"

"I think so. She seemed to be waving us off."

I put the machine on a climbing turn and turned to the nurse. "It doesn't look so good. I'm very sorry."

"That's all right." She had gone rather white.

We circled round. "What would you like to do?" I asked the doctor. "I can land, but I don't suppose I can stay there very long. This calm won't last more than an hour, at most."

"I think I ought to have a look at him," he said.

The girl leaned forward. "I want to land, please, Captain Clarke." I nodded. "Okay."

I brought her round, lined up on final, put full-flap down at the little tree, and plumped her well and truly down in the right spot. We came to rest about thirty yards from the far end. The woman was running towards us.

"Be as quick as you can," I said to the doctor and the nurse. I left the engine ticking over, and we all got out. Mrs. Hoskins came panting up.

The doctor asked, "He's dead, is he?"

"I'm sorry to say so," she said. "I tried to stop you."

"What time did he die?"

"A little after four, it must have been," she said.

Sister Dawson asked, "Have you got any news of the ground party?"

"They're a little way this side of Gordon River. They think they'll be here tomorrow dinner-time."

The girl asked, "Is there a burial ground here?"

"Well, there's a nice little place where we put Grandpa, looking out over the sea." She hesitated. "It's not consecrated, but he could lie there if you think that'd do."

The girl said, "We'll bury him here." She had taken charge of the situation. She turned to the doctor. "I'd like to go down to the house now. Then you can get away with Captain Clarke, and I'll stay and do what's necessary."

They all went to the house and I was left alone with the Auster, its engine still ticking over, on the little airstrip on the ridge above the sea. The sun had come up and it was very beautiful there between the mountains and the Southern Ocean in the blue dawn. I walked a little way back along the strip and off it to where the wreckage of the other Auster was lying. I examined it. The engine was worth salvaging, but nothing else. I stood sadly for a few minutes, thinking back. He had been a great influence on me in my youth; he had been part of my life. I would have said I knew him pretty well, if I had thought about it at all, but now it seemed to me I knew him much, much better.

I walked back along the little gravel runway. The strip was too narrow for me to turn the Auster in the normal way, so I carried the tail round and taxied down to the lee end. I turned her in the same way there and carried the tail back till the main wheels were at the extreme end of the strip.

The doctor came up from the house, just as I was beginning to get worried about a little rising air that moved the wind-sock. He was carrying the battered suit-case that we had dropped the day before. I took it from him. "Did anything get broken?"

"One bottle," he said. "It doesn't matter now, of course. We're taking the child to hospital, for observation. There's not much wrong with her now. The mother's dressing her."

"She'll have to hurry," I said. "I can't stay much longer."

"She knows that." As he spoke I saw the woman leave the house carrying the child, and hurry up the hill.

"How is Sister Dawson going to get out?" I asked.

"She'll come out with the ground party. She wants to stay here for the burial." He hesitated and then asked, "Is she a relation?"

"She's his illegitimate daughter," I said. "Don't go telling everyone."

"However did you find that out?" he exclaimed. "You only met her this morning!"

"I knew her mother," I said. "She was a fine woman. I remember when this girl was born. They had pretty bad luck." I paused. "I've known Johnnie Pascoe a great many years. We were old friends. There are some things a friend ought to know." And then I wondered why I had said that, and where I had heard it before. "Here she is," I said. "Let's get in."

I started the engine, and we got into the machine. The woman handed the child, wrapped in blankets, to the doctor, who took her on his lap. I took off down that appalling little strip. We made it all right with a bit to spare, and flew back up the coast without incident though the weather was closing in and the wind getting up again, and landed back on the airfield under a grey sky at about half past eight.

Billy Monkhouse came up to the machine as I was undoing my belt. "You heard the news?" I asked.

"They got it from the Lewis River soon after you took off. Too bad it had to happen."

I nodded and got out of the machine, and looked round. "What's happened to the Proctor and Dr. Parkinson?" I asked.

"They took off about an hour ago for Hobart. Wanted to get down while the good weather lasted. Mrs. Forbes went with them. You left the nurse there?"

I nodded. "Look, Mr. Monkhouse," I said. "I don't know what's going to happen about these two aircraft, and the house, and all the rest of his stuff. I don't know if he made a will."

"Mr. Dobson would have it, if there is one," he remarked. "He's the solicitor."

"You'd better go and ask him. If there is, I wouldn't be surprised to hear that he's left everything to Sister Dawson. She's visited him before, hasn't she?"

"Two or three times." He hesitated. "Looks a bit like him."

"Well, there you are," I said. "That's none of my business, and none of yours. But she'll probably be telling you what she wants done here."

"What will you be doing now, sir?"

"I'll get breakfast somewhere. Then I'll get back to Melbourne."

"Mrs. Lawrence is over in the house, waiting to cook you breakfast," he said. "I got that fixed for you."

The doctor joined us, and I said, "I think I can get a plane from Devonport today about the middle of the morning."

"I'll run you over in my car," the doctor said.

"That's very kind of you. There's breakfast going in Johnnie's house. Would you like to join me?" So we went together to the little house by the airport that I had left so full of quiet hope before the dawn, only a few hours before.

Mrs. Lawrence was in the kitchen, looking as if she had been crying. The doctor and I sat down to breakfast at the kitchen table, and Mrs. Lawrence went back to her own house, taking the child with her. After we had finished and were smoking over a final cup of coffee, the doctor brought up the subject that was on both our minds.

"I've been thinking over what you told me about Sister Dawson," he said. "After I've taken you to Devonport I'll take the little girl to hospital in Hobart; her father is still there. Then when the ground party come out, I could meet Sister Dawson with my car and bring her back up here."

That meant leaving his practice for three or four days, but that was his affair. "It would certainly be a help to her," I remarked.

"She left a suit-case at the vicarage. I could take that down with me in the car."

"I should do that. By the time you meet her she won't have had a change of clothes for three or four days, and she'll have walked about forty miles through the bush. I think she'll want to come back here. Johnnie probaby left everything to her. She'll have to settle what's to be done."

He nodded slowly. "I hadn't thought of that."

I glanced at him. "You'll be seeing a good deal of her?"

He met my eyes. "Probably."

"Well—look," I said. "She won't have a lot of money to throw around. She'll want to sell the two aircraft that are here. She doesn't have to pay a pilot to fly them away. I can get over here any time, and fly them to Moorabbin to be sold. Will you tell her I'd like to do that for her?"

"That's a very generous offer," he said.

I flushed a little. "Her father was a very old friend," I said. "And the girl's a good type, too."

He said quietly, "I think she's a very wonderful person."

"She's going to be a very lonely one now." Then I grinned at him. "Good luck."

He smiled, a little self-consciously. "Thank you."

I got up. "I'll give you a ring in a few days when you get back here, and you can tell me what the form is."

He drove me to Devonport and put me down at the airport. Then he went on southward, while I waited for the midday plane. I got back to Melbourne about half past one, and reported at the office. They had a crew fixed up to do my flight to Sydney that afternoon, so I got the day off; I had a late lunch in the restaurant and walked out to my car. It was only about thirty-six hours since I had left it in the park, but it seemed like so many years.

There was nobody at home when I got back to my house. Sheila sometimes did the shopping in the afternoon before fetching the children home from school, and I guessed that that was where she was now. I wandered round the house, fingering the children's toys, Sheila's fur stole that I had saved up for for so long, the tools in my workshop.

Johnnie Pascoe had been a better man than I, but he had never had the benisons of life that I had got. I hoped his daughter would be luckier. She would be, I thought, if the doctor had anything to do with it.

I got the cutter with the long handle, and began to trim the edges of the lawn.

Sheila came home with the children before I got it finished, and they came running to hug me. When the children were sent into the house to take their coats off, Sheila said, "He died, didn't he? They said so on the wireless."

I nodded. "We couldn't get in to him yesterday. I got a doctor and a nurse in at dawn today, but they were too late."

"I'm so sorry," she said softly. Peter came running back from the house towards us. "Tell me about it after they're in bed."

We went into the house because it was a bit cold in the garden for the children, and I lit the fire in the sitting-room, and we had tea. Then Diana showed me her latest paintings and Peter showed me the arrows he was making for the bow he had made, and I helped him a bit with that. Bedtime was coming near and it was time for me to read to them, and I took Diana on my knee and read to her from *Doctor Dolittle* as we always did on Fridays, my day off, till it was time for her to go with Mummy to her bath, and after that I read *Coot Club* to Peter. When he was off to bed I laid the supper table and got a glass of sherry for us both, and sat on the edge of the kitchen table talking to Sheila while she grilled the steak. Somehow, I felt that evening that I had never appreciated my home so much.

We ate our steak and apple-pie, and washed the dishes up. Then in the sitting-room, smoking by the fire, I told her everything factual that had happened in Tasmania. I didn't tell her anything about my dreams because people who insist on telling you what they dreamed are a bit of a bore, and, anyway, they didn't mean a thing.

When I had told her everything, I said, "I'll probably go over there again, and fly the aircraft to Moorabbin to be sold. I'd like to do that for him."

She nodded. "You'd known him a long time, hadn't you?"

"Nearly thirty years," I said. "I never knew till now that we were such close friends."



Nevil Shute

NEVIL SHUTE—whose real name is Nevil Shute Norway—has managed to combine two highly successful careers with grace and efficiency. Though he is one of the biggest-selling authors of our time, he still refers to himself as an “engineer who writes books.”

Born in Ealing, he went to Oxford after serving in the First World War. Afterwards, he played a large part in the building of the Airship R100 and during this time he began to dabble in adventure writing: his first novel, *Marazan*, was published in 1916, followed by *The Mysterious Aviator* in 1918.

After the shocking disaster to the R101, which put an end to airship building in Britain, Shute turned his attention to aeroplane construction and was so completely absorbed that for eight years he wrote nothing. However, in 1918, he resigned the directorship of his small aircraft factory and turned again to writing.

In the Second World War he became a lieutenant-commander in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and designed, he says, “unconventional toys and gadgets to assist the landings in France.” He also wrote a number of best-selling novels, including *Pied Piper*, *Most Secret* and *No Highway*. Amongst his most recent books are *A Town Like Alice*, *In the Wet* and *On the Beach*, which is being filmed with Gregory Peck.

About eight years ago Nevil Shute settled in Australia, and with his wife and two daughters he lives on a 205-acre dairy farm outside Melbourne.

THE BABY AND THE BATTLESHIP

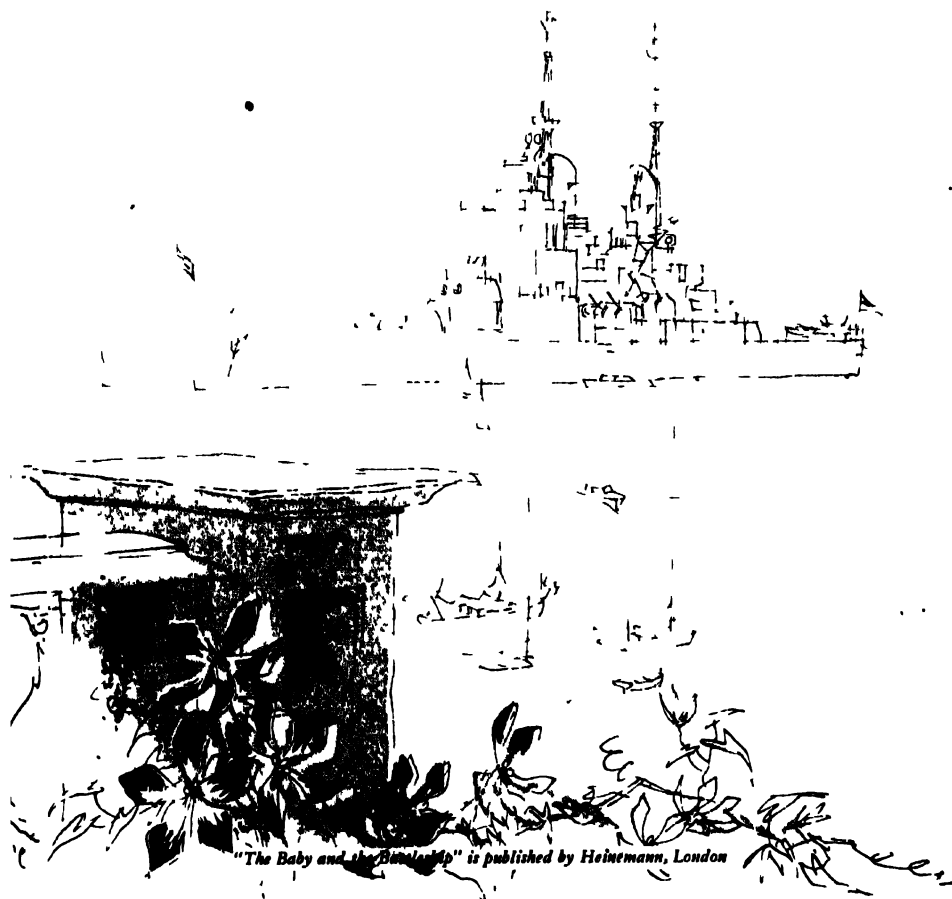


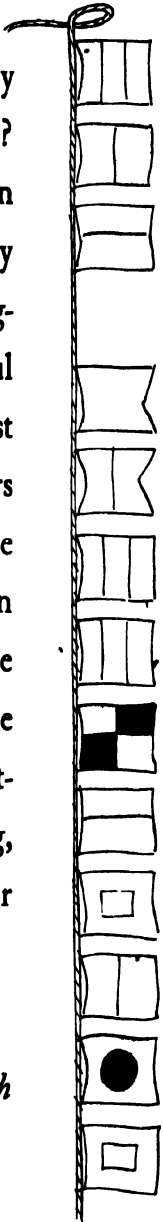
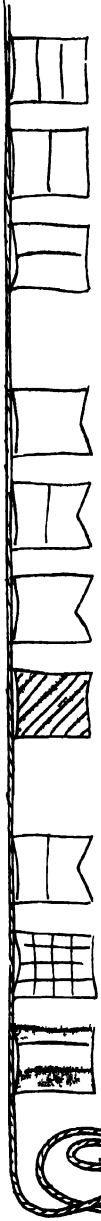
Illustrations by Richard O. Rose

THE BABY AND THE BATTLESHIP

A condensation of the book by

ANTHONY THORNE





WHY SHOULD IT have happened to Lofty and Pincher, two such very ordinary seamen? It seemed unbelievable, but their day ashore in Naples had saddled them with a real live baby which had to be smuggled aboard Britain's biggest battleship. On shore the baby's beautiful young mother frantically tries to trace her lost child, while equally frantically the two sailors at sea try to conceal it from the eagle eye of the Royal Navy, at that moment sternly engaged in important manoeuvres. The adventures of the two sailors and their small charge make hilarious reading, and the story gives a heart-warming picture of the Navy's way of coping, imperturbably, with any problem, however diverting and unusual.

"Exhilarating entertainment."

—*The Daily Telegraph*



"A good, gay, witty tale."—*Daily Sketch*



THE GREAT British battleship came slowly into the Bay of Naples and stood there with solid dignity, as though she had sent down mysterious legs to the sea-bed. Lesser ships may be said to "ride at anchor," but such a phrase applied to fifty thousand tons of belligerent ironmongery sounds too elegant—even a trifle frivolous. She stood so calmly and firmly as to shock the visitors who would come out, drenched to the skin, in a bouncing launch.

The deck on which a composed Officer of the Watch would await them was as dry and motionless as the tenth floor of a hotel.

Not that there were many visitors to be expected. The only one of real importance was at that moment somewhere in the sky, being hurled towards Naples, the battleship, and a mission. The Captain was waiting anxiously to know the time of his arrival.

That anxiety he carefully concealed, standing on the top Bridge open to the sky, and turning his head casually to look about him.

To seaward lay the island-rock of Capri, dark blue and rugged as a goat's haunches.

He raised his binoculars to stare at Naples on the opposite quarter, a warm chalky iridescence of houses that sprawled up slopes and over headlands from Posilipo in the north, crammed with beautiful and expensive villas, down to Piedigrotta, the home of song. Then what? The harbour itself, had he mislaid it? But no, it was always veiled like that, even at the distance of a mile. Until a launch took you past the

striped jetty and the orange beacon you could not possibly imagine what it was like.

"Sir."

The Captain wheeled round to acknowledge with a cursory chop of the hand the signal that had been handed to him by the Commander. He read it without expression, then said quietly:

"Eight thirty tomorrow morning, Commander. I suppose it's quite a tactful time to choose for his arrival—since he has to arrive."

"Clear of Colours, anyway."

By that time the ceremony of hoisting the flag would be over by half an hour, allowing a decent pause in which to brace oneself for the effort of welcoming the V.I.P. and of seeing that the welcome did him honour—but not too much honour, for he was only a civilian after all.

The Captain was well aware that the Commander expected further comment, but for the moment he continued his inspection of Naples.

At last he frowned, lowering his binoculars. Then he gave the Commander what he was expecting.

"Well—I take it that we're fully prepared? No mistakes allowed, nothing must go wrong. I want every man on his toes."

At this moment the First Lieutenant joined the Bridge, and brought with him an air of cheerfulness. Pleasant-looking, and appearing far more youthful than he really was, he was popular with the Lower Deck, which always has a regard for anyone whose authority can be tempered by a flash of humour.

He received the news of the V.I.P.'s arrival with equanimity and turned and looked aft along the decks to see that the ratings were getting out the boom and the gangway to starboard, supervised by the ever-roaring Chief Petty Officer Blades. Only once did he glance towards shore, and for a second his alertness relaxed. Memory and anticipation brought a smile to his face.

"Does that mean," he could hear the Commander asking the Captain, "no going ashore today, sir?"

"What, leave in Naples? A bit dangerous, I'd have thought."

The First Lieutenant turned and said:

"Ship's company's all right, sir. I don't think there'd be any trouble."

"There'd better not be, Number One," said the Captain. And then to the Commander: "All right—you can give leave."

And so Jimmy the One, as the Lower Deck called the First Lieutenant, slid rapidly down the three sharply tilted steel ladders that led from the top Bridge, and walked over to Chief Petty Officer Blades, who was barking almost simultaneously at every rating within range.

"I said *coil* it down, not *chuck* it down!" And to two who were turning up a rope, "Call that a knot? Why, it looks like an old man's entrails! Do it proper, now, then get below!"

"Blades," cut in the First Lieutenant, and the stout, purplish, furious little man turned and saluted him smartly. "It's this question of leave for the Port Watch. I want you to let them all know that they'd better behave themselves."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Blades, his angry blue eyes dimmed to a respectful stare. And then, with an unfortunate muscle's contraction dragging at the corner of his mouth, "*I'll tell 'em.*"

The two ratings who were hastily re-forming the offending knot exchanged glances in which apprehension was mixed with pleasure. Blades would certainly "tell 'em." It was something, though, to be granted leave and to be the first to know of it. They did not wait to hear any more, but turned to go below.

YOU WOULD have thought Lofty Baines and Pincher Martin an odd pair of sailors to have formed a close friendship—Lofty a tall, fair, irresponsible lad with a well-fostered reputation of being the ship's Casanova; and Pincher, a solid, shapeless little man who looked as though he had been issued with clothing intended for somebody else, and who had an air of being baffled by everything that happened to him. Conscientious to a degree, he was one of those sailors who, having perhaps put a foot wrong early in their naval career, find themselves increasingly liable to get out of step.

He was looking baffled now, as they turned into one of those countless cluttered little corridors filled with hammock-racks, lagged pipes, water-tight doors and all the protruding complications of which a battleship's inside is capable.

"I don't think much," he announced, lifting his heavy feet to step through yet another doorway, "of that there volcano."

"Never seen Naples afore? No, of course you ain't." Lofty laughed. "You come aboard at Gib—you and the Admiral."

(It was always a shock to remember that there was an Admiral aboard. He sat enthroned on his own bridge, and was rarely seen. The Captain ran the ship, with the Admiral as ghostly guest.)

"What's Naples like, Lofty? Are we going ashore together?"

"Of course, Pincher. Anyway, I can show you Naples before we goes ashore."

"How's that, Lofty?"

They came into their mess, a small and crowded place, for the inside of a battleship is a conglomeration of little match-boxes. Their own match-box had two tables alongside the bulkhead, vying with each other in colour. The first had blue benches against yellow distemper. The table on which Lofty's and Pincher's mates relaxed or played cards or wrote letters was red against green, known to the rest of the ship as Stop-Go.

Lofty paused before it and said a little loudly, to attract the attention which he always felt was his due:

"Because I got a photo of Naples, Pincher. I always keeps a photo of every port I been to. Want to have a look?"

He whipped off his cap, but a little too smartly, for the half-dozen cigarette butts which had been hidden in the lining followed a shower of photographs to the deck. There was a laugh and a scramble, but by pushing and punching Lofty managed to rescue them.

Now everybody was interested, the Welsh Bungy Williams, Whiskers, fat Whacker Payne, hastily swallowing the last of a biscuit; even Jumper Foote, who gave himself airs, looked round, even deadpan Nobby Clark—even old nutcracker Stripey, the president or "killick" of the mess, who was interested in few things beyond good conduct, fair play, and knitting.

Lofty looked hard at the first photograph before he threw it carelessly on the table.

"No—that's New York."

It was a picture of a pretty girl.

As they burst out laughing, another charmer followed.

"Portsmouth," said Lofty, and then he flung them down in rapid succession—Plymouth, Gibraltar, Trincomalee, Tangier . . .

"Oh, here we are," said Lofty at last. "This is Naples. Nice view, eh?"

He held it up, and there was silence; for this girl was not of a distant country, she was here, perhaps waiting for him on the quay; and it was evident that Lofty was very lucky.

The smile was dazzlingly provocative, it had a vitality and wickedness which were echoed in the flash of dark eyes and in the tilt of eyebrow. Her hair was dressed in the fashion of Neapolitan nursemaids, piled high on top of her forehead and falling in a sleek black mantle behind her.

"What's her name?" somebody asked, and for a moment Lofty's handsome but somewhat ingenuous face revealed that he had quite forgotten. Remembering suddenly, he blurted it out: otherwise he would not have dreamed of telling them.

"Nina," he said. "That's it—Nina Ferrari."

SHE STOOD in a curious but lovely room with only three walls and half a ceiling. Where the fourth wall would have been, two stone columns framed the glittering bay, and where the pantiled roof sloped down towards the balustraded terrace, a vine-covered pergola offered a lighter shifting shade of golden-green leaves. This terrace remembered Pompeii—and the girl who stood there could have been a young Pompeian too, amber-coloured, her large slumbering eyes like dark coins in her rounded face. Her mouth, so ready for laughter, was made heavy by a pout, and when she heard the Contessa calling her she frowned sulkily.

"Nina!" the Contessa called again. "Nina, where are you?"

Her eyes flashed then, and with an impatient shrug she went through the half-opened door into the nursery. She was now no more than a little aproned maid in a luxurious villa of the Posilipo quarter.

The Contessa, looking down at the cot, was fastening a bracelet over her black glove. She said coolly, without looking round:

"But I could find nothing wrong with him at all. I don't know why you should go out of your way to alarm me!" She gave Nina a shrewd glance and said with amusement: "Or was it because I asked you to stay in and look after the child——? Yes, that was it. Because you had to remain here, I too must be prevented from going out!" She laughed and picked up her bag. "Really, Nina, that is *too* Neapolitan."

It was a pity, perhaps, to have referred to the underlying cause of their daily differences—that Nina was a southerner and she from the

north. They could indeed have come from completely different countries, Luisa Marioli with her soft Venetian voice, her warm gold hair, her pale translucent skin, her poise, her serenity—and Nina Ferrari, dark and mischievous with the blood of Carthage.

To make amends Luisa said gently:

"You shall see your English sailors tomorrow, Nina. Today—for a change—I am going to see my friends. And if you need me I shall be at the Belvedere delle Rose."

She gave Nina a long steady glance which, expressing trust in her, put her under an obligation. And then she turned and walked down the stairs to her car.

In it she leaned back and closed her eyes. When the Conte Marioli was alive she had detested parties—his feverish gambling and drinking parties that had seemed to her vulgar and boring after the elegant receptions of the Grand Canal, parties which, here in alien Naples, had always ended in scenes of violent jealousy. But let these things be forgotten now. It was only too easy to hurt oneself by reliving them. Marioli was dead. The parties were dead too, and for some months before and after the birth of Carlo she had led a tranquil uneventful life.

And now, after all these months, she herself was going to a party—one that would not have interested her husband in the very least, semi-formal, given by Lamotte, the French Naval Attaché. She looked forward to it with an almost childlike delight.

Yet a ghost touched her as she paused on the threshold, and for a moment she wanted to drive straight back to the villa. Then she was aware of eyes looking at her with admiration, and knew that now there was no one to count their glances and reproach her with them.

SHE CAME slowly forward, smiling, and an unmistakably English voice called her by name. She put out her hand, foolishly expecting it to be lifted to his lips, but the First Lieutenant was shy of such foreign gallantries and shook it cheerfully.

"My first party for ages," she said, "and you are here! I wondered, when I saw your big beautiful ship this morning if you would be able to come."

"I very nearly couldn't—and I've got to leave early too."

"As a matter of fact I nearly could not get here myself—my little

nursemaid was not at all anxious to stay at home and look after the baby. Really, the British Navy seems to be very—demoralizing!”

“I should jolly well hope so,” said Number One. “Oh, hallo, Carson.”

She turned her head to find that an immaculately white-suited civilian was standing near them—so near that the First Lieutenant could scarcely have avoided a greeting. Perhaps the civilian had intended that that should be the case? He was staring at her in a way that she did not by any means dislike—the face, in spite of its firm features, had gentleness, sensitivity. She heard the First Lieutenant saying:

“I expect you’ve met John Carson of the British Consulate?”

“Not yet.”

“Contessa Marioli.”

“He hasn’t been here very long,” said Number One—and then, as he saw Carson lift her hand to his lips: “But long enough, it seems, for him to have learned your charming Italian party manners.”

Carson said good-humouredly:

“But surely—whether you shake a lady’s hand or kiss it isn’t a matter of manners. It’s just geography.”

Luisa smiled, enjoying the light-hearted duel between two agreeable males. She said to Carson:

“And do you think you will like Naples?”

He looked at her steadily.

“I’m beginning to admire it very much.”

The band had begun again, and she knew that one or other of them would ask her to dance.

“Would you——”

“Sorry,” said Number One, taking her resolutely by the arm, “but life and leave are so short!”

Carson bowed and said with mock gravity:

“You naval types get all the luck, don’t you?”

Number One laughed and led her down to the waxed tile floor under the rose-covered pergolas. He glanced at her once or twice while they were dancing, and smiled, but did not speak. When had she first met him? He was an odd acquaintance for her to have made when the Conte was alive. Somebody had brought him along after another party, a young naval officer cheerfully disposed to join in anybody’s fun.

He said ruefully, as the music died:

"End of dance—end of everything for me, I'm afraid. I'm duty-boy, and this was stolen time." He took her hand and pressed it warmly. "And so it's good-bye again. I'm glad to have seen you so happy."

He turned abruptly and was lost among the couples who were already starting to dance again. She walked back to the balustrade and stood for a moment looking out over the Bay at the battleship. From its long grey hull a Liberty Boat detached itself and came streaming away towards shore, churning blue water into milky green.

Several people had wandered away from the dance floor and were looking at the battleship. As Luisa turned away from them she took with a smile the glass of champagne that John Carson was offering her—not unexpectedly. For although they had said little they already knew one another well, with surprise and delight and with something even more significant, the fear of hurt.

THAT Liberty Boat, carrying a small section of the Port Watch, passed through the misty blue veil that always shrouded the ancient harbour. There was a certain amount of activity among the ratings in it, for they were nearing the quay. Lanyards must be adjusted and the black silks smoothed. Mates tugged at one another's collars.

"Nobody adrift, now!" warned Stripey as they came smoothly alongside. "You heard what Blades said, didn't you?"

As soon as they filed through the harbour gates they could see, beginning in the shadow of the old Angioino fortress, a fairground with whirling wheels, crashing electric cars, sideshows and swings. As it happened, they had struck a festival, but any sailor who has been half an hour ashore in Naples, knows there will be a fairground somewhere. It looked all right, this Fair. In twos and threes they struck off in different directions, whistling and singing and pointing at things that seemed to them laughably un-English.

Lofty and Pincher were left behind, for Nina was nowhere in sight. Lofty was gazing distractedly round.

"Well, would you believe it," he said, "letting me down like this? That's women all over, take it from me. Probably got herself spliced to some Itie, and never mind poor old Jack." And then, waving both arms frantically: "Nina! Nina!"

A girl was alighting from a trolley-bus, and now came hastening

towards them. In a moment Lofty was flinging his arms round her and kissing her.

"Why, I thought you wasn't coming!" Then, recoiling from her in alarm: "Why, what's all this?"

Nina was carrying a six-months-old baby wrapped in a shawl. She said breathlessly, with a very thick Italian accent:

"Oh, sailor—you understand I have to bring the *bambino* with me or I cannot arrive at all. His mama la Contessa, she goes to a club to dance, and she nearly prevents me of coming!"

"Well, crown it," said Lofty, annoyed. "Oh, I suppose we'll manage somehow. Anyway—this is my mate, Pincher."

Pincher shuffled his feet. He was at the same time thoroughly uncomfortable and completely bowled over by Nina.

"Hullo," he said; and then, fatuously: "Quite like your photo, aren't you?"

"Well," said Lofty, trying to make the best of things, "Well, here we all are. Now—where shall we go? How about the Fair?"

"The Fair?" Nina said doubtfully, and then, understanding: "*Ma sì, la Festa!* You come with me—both of you?" Farther on, it seemed, there was an even better fairground.

Cheerful again, Lofty thrust one arm through Nina's and the other through Pincher's—there was no resisting him, though Pincher dragged at first, feeling himself the odd man out. They left the quayside for the town, entering a side-street of multi-coloured houses—blue-washed, green-washed, pink-washed—the lower walls of which were plastered with out-of-date election posters.

As they turned a corner into a narrow street festooned with washing—you could see the entrance to another fairground at the end of it—Pincher's mouth set stubbornly. If he did not make a stand now he would be with Lofty and Nina for the evening.

"I ain't coming with you, and that's flat"

"For why, Pincher?"

"Well—two's company and three's a washout."

"We're four anyway," said Lofty, laughing. "You've forgotten the baby!"

"I mean—you know what I mean. You want to be with Nina."

"Well, I *am* with Nina," said Lofty, and turned to kiss her again.

Then he said mock-seriously to Pincher, giving him a friendly punch: "Listen, mate, don't you never think we don't want you. In fact"—he took the baby from Nina and planted it firmly in Pincher's arms—"in fact, we *need* you!"

Though both Lofty and Nina seemed to find this exceedingly funny, they did not stay long to enjoy the joke. Hand in hand they ran through the gaudily painted canvas archway.

"Lofty!" cried Pincher, appalled, hastening after them. "Listen, Lofty, you can't do this to me!"

Before Pincher had taken half a dozen steps they were clambering into a Dodgem car, and were off on a wild, drunken course, shrieking with laughter and bumping everybody—including, he saw to his dismay, a couple of sailors from the battleship. He turned away hastily. If they saw him with this baby he'd never live it down. Now it kicked him in the ribs. So far it had been perfectly still, a bundle, a parcel, and it was a shock to Pincher that the thing was really alive. He parted the shawl. For the first time he and the baby stared at one another.

It was a very ordinary-looking baby with a fuzz of black hair and round black eyes much too large for its face. Its head suddenly gave one of those sickening lurches, as though it were about to drop off. Horrified, Pincher wrapped the shawl tightly round it in the hope of keeping the thing together.

And now it started to squawk. He began rocking it in his arms, and at this unfortunate moment three American sailors happened to notice him.

"Get that?"

They slapped their thighs and went into howls of laughter. Pincher, more embarrassed than ever, hastened away to the stalls.

Here they were selling an extraordinary variety of objects—coral in great quantity, from deep red to white, in the form of charms, necklaces, brooches; brilliantly coloured Mexican straw hats; peanuts, religious statues, and ice-cream. Everybody was doing a brisk and noisy trade, and it was difficult not to find yourself involved. At one moment Pincher's cap was snatched from his head and a pink straw hat substituted for it.

"You gimme that back!" demanded Pincher. The Italian stall-keeper smiled, returned his cap, and said something incomprehensible,

pointing to the baby. Then he pointed at Pincher. "*Papà?*"

Pincher shook his head vigorously, which provoked another speech, this time in a commiserating voice as though the Italian himself had been similarly deceived and that wives were never to be trusted.

Still no Lofty, no Nina.

Patient and faithful creature though Pincher was, he began to think badly of Lofty. What on earth was he up to? Cuddling in a corner, maybe—or he and Nina could even have slipped out of the place, with no intention of coming back until it was time to catch the Liberty Boat.

The fairground was filling with sailors now, there were far too many of them for him to escape notice much longer. Why there was old Whiskers, and making straight for the hat stall!

"Come on, chum," he muttered to the baby. "We're getting out of this perishing place."



He turned a corner of the shawl over its face and started down the road away from the fairground. A wine shop, that was what he wanted, to wet his whistle, and if Lofty turned up in the meantime he could wait. Only a few doors down, next to a church, there was a promising-looking place, and he sat at a table near the entrance so that he could see the archway, where Lofty and Nina had left him. An enormous, very handsome woman like a Goddess of Plenty came shuffling towards him in carpet slippers. He said the one word in Italian that every sailor knows: "*vino*." She went away to draw the wine from a barrel.

Somebody came to the door and played a guitar. That started the baby crying again. All the customers turned and looked at it with sentimental expressions and made sympathetic noises. Then the big handsome woman picked it up and felt its underneath. It was very damp. She turned suddenly with a great sweep of her skirts and carried it away into the inner quarters of the house.

Pincher jumped to his feet as the door shut.

"No!" he shouted. "No! You bring that there back here!"

He did not know what was happening. The customers tried to pacify him and he glowered at them. What an infuriating lot the Italians were, yammering stuff at you that you couldn't make head or tail of. He sat down slowly, but kept his eyes fixed on the door through which the woman had disappeared with the baby. He would not touch the wine she had brought, thirsty as he was, until the baby was back.

A long time seemed to pass, and he grew more and more anxious.

At last she came back with the baby, beaming, and handed it over to him. It was dry now, and dribbling milk—she had evidently attended to both its inner and outer needs. He smiled up at her, ashamed of his outburst, and said:

"Thank you, ma'am."

Then he filled his glass and poured the wine straight down his throat. He began to feel happier.

He looked down at the baby, which had fallen asleep again. It was no size at all, its bones were jelly, it did nothing but drink, sleep, belch, bawl and wet itself; but it was nevertheless a person, and a person about whom he felt a certain responsibility. It had been given to him and it was his—until Nina returned.

Surely they'd be there by now, standing at the archway? He got up

and went into the street and was surprised to find how much the shadows had lengthened, turning a deep ultramarine against the warm pink flooding of the sunset.

And there, at last, with their backs to him, stood a tall fair sailor and a little Neapolitan girl. "Lofty!" yelled Pincher. "Hey, Lofty!"

They turned their heads. They were strangers. He said crestfallen: "Sorry. Mistake."

Pincher turned and walked away. Miserable with disappointment, he began to feel that he would be carrying this creature about for evermore. Where could he go, what could he do with it? It was already getting dark, and the Fair was brilliantly lit, but there was still no sign of either Lofty or Nina.

"I reckon they forgot all about us, chum," he muttered. "And if Lofty ain't careful he'll forget the Liberty Boat as well, then we *shall* be in the rattle." He peered at his watch, and suddenly let out a yell. "Eleven minutes! Cor Suffering Snakes and Stomach Pills, *eleven minutes!*"

There was no time to look any farther. By himself he could have reached the Liberty Boat in about five minutes, but somehow, somewhere, he had to dispose of the baby. He pushed and struggled through what seemed to be the entire population of Naples, until at last he saw he had not far to go now—there was the harbour at the bottom of the Piazza Municipio, and in the darkness the distant lights of shipping.

The darkness, however, was only momentary, for with a sudden roar the whole of Naples was lit up. It was as though Vesuvius had erupted again. Out of a great cloud of flaring red came a thousand green and white stars that leaped hissing into the sky, and glittering fountains poured down as they exploded.

Pincher ran as though the devil were after him. This was too much, to be sent off with a firework display that would reveal, with startling intensity, the farthest and darkest corners. Somewhere on the quayside he would have to leave the baby—there was nothing else for it. He ran through the harbour gates, glad to be back with comprehensible and familiar shipping, and away from all these foreigners with their peculiar habits.

Stars shot down from the sky and up through the water. He looked round distractedly, panting. He ran over to a pile of crates by a warehouse, looking for shadow.

"It's all up, little Wop. This is the bit where we part company. Didn't think Pincher'd let you down, did you? Well, Pincher blooming well would!"

Putting it on top of one of the boxes he walked away from it . . . but not very far. Supposing these crates were to be loaded later tonight in the darkness, hauled up by crane, swinging dizzily from the quay to the deep black hold of a freighter? The thought of it stuck knives into him. There must surely be a better place to leave it.

But as he snatched it up again he knew at once that he was lost. For near at hand his mates were singing drunkenly.

"Rolling home, rolling home, by the light of the silvery moon——"

He flung a corner of the shawl over the baby's face, and found himself surrounded by a disorderly rabble of sailors. They were all laden with trophies, Bungy Williams with an outsize, bulbous flask of Chianti and a white shawl over his arm, Jumper with a large doll for his kid, Stripey with a huge hank of knitting wool.

"Seen Lofty?" he asked Bungy Williams at once.

"No, man." Bungy glanced at Pincher's burden. "Now there's sensible, Pincher," he said, "and I will do the same with mine."

With which he took his own shawl and wrapped it round the bottle of Chianti—and you would have thought, as they walked along together in that semi-darkness, that there was very little difference between their respective bundles.

"Seen Lofty anywhere?" Pincher kept asking as he pushed down the waiting Liberty Boat towards the stern. But nobody had—and Lofty was certainly not aboard.

Suddenly there was another shower of shooting stars. As Bungy leaned over the side to spit, the shawl fell away from the neck of his Chianti flask.

"Bungy Williams," said Stripey sharply, "you ditch that at once! You knows we ain't allowed to bring liquor aboard."

With a furious gesture Bungy flung the bottle of Chianti over the side.

"And that goes for you too, Pincher. Go on—chuck it overboard!"

But this horrible situation was suddenly saved by a wild yell from the shore. They all turned their heads.

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!"

Lofty at last—limping painfully and with his head bandaged. One of

the ratings went half-way up the steps of the quay to help him down into the boat.

Pincher took the opportunity to lower the baby gently to the deck and cover it with his wide white trouser-legs. "What happened?" he asked anxiously as Lofty flung himself down beside him.

"What happened!" said Lofty, staring in front of him as though he were still witnessing the evening's events with himself as chief actor. "Why, we was in a swing, and one of the blinking ropes bust. Tipped it right over. Lucky we hadn't got any higher, might have broken our necks. Bad enough as it was—both of us knocked cold, both taken to hospital."

"Nina hurt too?"

"Her wrist, she was fairly screeching when I last saw her. They bandaged my loaf for me, but then I jumped it as soon as they'd finished, else I'd have missed the Liberty Boat." He sighed with relief at having caught it. "I suppose you took the baby to the police."

"The police!" said Pincher, dismayed. "I never thought of them!"

"Then where *did* you take it?" Pincher was afraid to meet Lofty's eye. "Pincher—what you done with that there baby?"

For an instant Pincher parted his legs and pointed downward.

"It's here, mate. And as far as I can see, it's part of ship's company!"

Horried, Lofty half-rose to his feet, but collapsed again with a groan. The lights of the port grew smaller, and blurred to a distant shimmer. A great grey hull stood waiting.

BY LONG practice a sailor can generally present a sober appearance on the Quarter Deck, even if he falls flat on his face as soon as he goes below. First, however, he has to pass the sentries and the Duty Chief at the top of the gangway.

This Duty Chief Petty Officer is permanently in a semi-crouching position, for it is his job to run his hands down each sailor's jumper and pockets as he steps aboard. The sailor naturally puts up his arms—and what he carries above his head is "nobody's business." The Duty Chief, certainly, has no time to take account of it.

Tonight, the first rating automatically put up his arms as the Chief ran his hands down him. Then Jumper stepped aboard, raising his doll over his head.

"All right, Chief, I got no bottles."

After a second's hesitation Pincher followed him, lifting the baby.

"Nor me neither."

"Come on, there," shouted the Chief to those behind him. "We ain't got all night!"

Whiskers, who had unfortunately developed hiccoughs, held his breath and steadied himself. His entry, under the circumstances, was most creditable if a trifle too majestic.

Two or three followed quickly. Then Lofty, limping.

When he reached his mess some men had already slung their hammocks, and some were slinging them with practised hands.

"Seen my mate anywhere?" asked Lofty. "Seen Pincher?"

Looking distractedly round, he began pulling off his lanyard and silk and collar. It was beyond him to remove the jumper alone. As all his clothes were skin-tight he had to be undressed like an enormous helpless child.

Blast Pincher, where had he got to? Hiding that baby, no doubt, and in a vast, complicated battleship there were a hundred places where he could have been hiding it. Lofty peered into the Seamen's Heads and shouted for him, but there was no Pincher. Nor was he in either of the Galleys. Lofty found him at last in the Laundry.

He was on his own, leaning against the bulkhead, his eyes fixed ruminatingly on the washing and drying machines. Pincher was evidently *thinking*. He started as Lofty confronted him.

"Well, of all the perishing fools—to bring a perishing baby aboard a perishing battleship!"

"Couldn't help it, mate," said Pincher quietly. "It just seemed to happen."

"Where is the little basket anyway?"

"In the Firework tank."

"Crikey, it can't stay there!"

"But I propped the lid open so as it can breathe——"

"I'm thinking of *us*, you twerp. If it gets found there we're all done for. Cor, what a moment to choose! Haven't you heard the buzz? All of us on our toes—for a V.I.P. coming aboard?"

"A V.I.P.?" said Pincher vaguely. He seemed too dazed to take it in.

"Very Important Person—why, a Cabinet Minister or something.

Look, we better hide it somewhere safe tonight and get it ashore tomorrow morning."

"But we *can't*—it ain't our blooming watch ashore."

"All right, then, we get somebody in the Starboard Watch to sub for us." It was no uncommon arrangement that a Libertyman who did not particularly want to go ashore would sell his privilege to someone who did.

"Anyway," Lofty went on, "you put the baby in the Band Instrument Room for now—it'll be O.K. there. And as for me, I better write Nina a postcard at once. Come on."

He limped back towards the mess. Pincher sighed, and went off to retrieve the baby.

Already more hammocks had been slung and more ratings had disappeared into them. Most of the clutter had been put away too, and there was practically nothing on the table but an open ditty box, a few postcards, and Stripey's false teeth. He was laboriously knitting a sock while Whacker was just as laboriously writing home.

Lofty took a postcard and started to write schoolboyishly, with his tongue sticking out of the corner of his mouth.

"Nina, we have got it and all O.K.," he wrote. And what next? "Trust the Navy." That was a good bit, it would make everything seem all right and stop the Ities from screaming. He paused, looked up at the deckhead, and then wrote rapidly with sudden inspiration, "Will bring it ashore same time tomorrow, don't worry, hope you are better, yours to a cinder, Lofty and Pincher."

As he limped out to post the card Pincher was coming back from the Band Instrument Room and winked at him reassuringly. Pincher had found a spot for the baby between a trombone and a bassoon which, if it was not exactly what the little creature had been accustomed to, was at least better than the top of a packing-case on the quayside. The baby was whimpering now, doubtless wanting more milk.

Back in the mess, Pincher looked over at Stripey, who was sitting immediately under the food locker. Pincher assumed an expression of woe, and put his hand on some vague part of his belly.

"Stripey, how's your sock getting on?"

"Fine, thanks." Stripey looked up. "Why, what's the matter with you?"

"I feels awful—kind of funny inside. I reckon I got an ulster in me stomach."

"It's all that *vino*," said Stripey sagely. "What I always say is—milk."

"I know," agreed Pincher eagerly.

"Go on, then." Stripey jerked a knitting-needle towards the locker. "Help yourself."

"Oh, thanks, Stripey!"

He opened the locker and extracted a jug of tinned milk. Without another word he rushed off with it. Stripey looked up, startled.

PINCHER FED the baby, and left it safely asleep. When he returned to the mess, Lofty was waiting for him, and together they set out in quest of a "sub" for the next day. Soon they were prowling separately among the curved brown bat-like hammocks of the Starboard Watch. Pincher was beginning to be slightly alarmed, for the matter must be settled without delay; and by this time nearly everyone seemed to have fallen asleep. Now and again a cough or a yawn betrayed wakefulness, and he was quick to attack—but results had so far been negative.

Starting systematically on another row of hammocks, he nearly collided with Lofty, who had been working from the other side.

"Any luck, Lofty?"

"Not yet, not a perisher will."

"I know," said Pincher. "We'll try Shorty. He's Starboard Watch and I don't believe as he ever goes ashore."

They dived under a few more hammocks and Lofty punched the bottom of one of them. From under the blanket came a muffled squeak, and then a cross, dour, spinsterish little face appeared.

"Oh, Shorty," said Lofty engagingly, "we was wondering if you was going ashore tomorrow."

"Nah, course not, you knows I never do. All right, I'll sub for you and it'll cost you six bob."

At once, automatically, he lowered a bare arm over the side of his hammock, the palm of his hand like a scoop.

"Six bob!" said Lofty indignantly. "Why, he's a blooming Black Marketeer! Five's the price."

"Depends on the place," said Shorty, and the little face leered.

"All right," said Pincher hastily, "six bob." It was too late to start an

argument and he was afraid that Lofty would lose his temper and rouse the entire deck for the sake of a shilling.

"Give it him, then," said Lofty disgustedly.

There was a clinking of coins, and Shorty's arm was withdrawn. Well, it was a relief to have settled the matter. Stooping together they crept back under the hammocks, but before they reached the doorway the loudspeaker began blaring an announcement in a voice calculated to penetrate the sweetest dreams of any sailor.

"D'you hear there?" it warned. "D'you hear there?" There was a slight pause, and then: "All leave is cancelled. All leave is cancelled. *There will be no leave tomorrow.*"

There was a click of finality as the thing was switched off.

Stunned, Lofty and Pincher turned to stare at one another.

"We've had it, mate," said Lofty. "Now we've blooming well had it."

"And what's more," said Pincher, almost hysterical with despair, "Shorty's had my six suffering bob! Shorty, where are you?" He ran wildly among the hammocks. "Shorty! Shorty!"

LUISA HAD not been allowed to leave the Belvedere delle Rose alone. Even if champagne and dancing were not the wrong sort of prelude to a solitary meal at home, John Carson would have had little difficulty in persuading her to drive with him along the coast road to Sorrento. It would be cooler there, and they could dine on a terrace overlooking the sea.

As they drove they were both silent and content with silence. When at last they felt it must be broken, they both spoke at once—he asking her in what part of Italy she had been born, and she asking him if he knew Venice. They laughed then and began to exchange reminiscences.

Before they got out of the car they paused and smiled at one another, as though reluctant now to commit themselves to the formal behaviour of two people about to dine in a restaurant with many others.

Neither of them was hungry. A bottle of wine, yes, but what then? All they wanted was something to play with, some pretence that would allow them to sit there together. But waiters were fussing round them, and there had to be conversation. It was not enough that he should be staring at her hands round the glass, as though he longed to cover them, nor that he should be aware that she was studying the way his hair grew

up from his forehead as though it were important for her to remember this for all time.

He asked her:

"Has anybody ever said anything good about the Neapolitans?"

She smiled and took her hands from her glass.

"Yes—in novels."

"Such a wonderful part of the world—look at the great sweep of it, and the colour—and yet all of it somehow made faintly sinister. How would *you* describe these people?"

"They can be gayer than any people I have ever met, singing and playing always, but very sad too, sometimes—sadder than anyone else. They are as old as Egypt, there is something very ancient about their wickedness. They are—what else? Crafty—subtle—superstitious—oh, so many things. But perhaps I am too—too—prejudiced."

He looked at her thoughtfully.

"That wasn't only Venice speaking. I believe you've been very unhappy here."

"Yes." She looked away. "I can remember what it is like, to be unhappy."

The orchestra interrupted them suddenly, and as they turned their heads their mood changed to laughter. Amongst the guitars and mandolins stood a small boy with an earthenware jar nearly as tall as he, into which he blew at appropriate moments. The jar emitted a deep and hollow note, the very male and authoritative *fuzz-fuzz* of a double-bass. There was something irresistibly comical in the way this serious, wide-eyed little cherub played grandfather to the tinkling strings.

"D'you suppose I could ever do that?" demanded John. "I'd willingly give up my evenings."

"Blowing into a jar? You would need to be a Neapolitan, and even then it must take years of practice."

"Not more than ten, judging by that *bambino*. But perhaps one needs to start young—almost as a baby?" He turned to look at her, and was concerned to find her glancing thoughtfully, even a little anxiously, towards Naples. She shivered slightly. "Is it too cool for you on the terrace? Would you rather go?"

She smiled, but for a second her eyes were looking beyond him. She said calmly: "Yes. I think I must go now—I do not know why."

JOHN fell silent on the homeward journey, distracted by the Italian night-traffic, but as they reached Naples he asked her :

"One o'clock at Zi Teresa?"

He did not say "tomorrow," for it was inconceivable that they should not meet the very next day. Nor, as they passed the glittering little port of Santa Lucia with the blue lights of Zi Teresa mirrored among the restless boats, did it need explaining that he had chosen a waterside restaurant in which there is always a torrent of warm music and a bunch of flowers to be chosen.

"Yes."

She said nothing but that. Her simplicity and eagerness betrayed her.

And now, the slopes of Posilipo—the winding road to the gates of her villa, through which one could see in the dusk a tiled fountain and the deep wine-stains of bougainvillaea over white walls.

He took both her hands, though it was perhaps then that he should have taken her in his arms. Was she a little preoccupied about some matter of which he knew nothing? Very well, there seemed at that moment no reason on earth why he should not wait—for a day at least. Tomorrow she would have forgotten what was troubling her. Tomorrow—*domani*, a word of expectation.

For a moment they stood like this, and then, with a pressure of dismissal, she took her hands from his and turned away. He watched her walk towards the door. Then he started the car.

It was the sudden opening of that door, the light streaming on her unexpectedly, that startled her.

That, and the manservant's terrified face.

II

SHE WAS still smoking when the dawn broke, and her hand trembled as it held the cigarette. Without knowing what she was doing she had got up from the chaise-longue and wandered over to the balustrade of the terrace. The water of the Gulf was smooth, oily, faintly iridescent. It turned slowly from a pale flamingo colour to a yellow-green.

The telephone was on a small table by the chaise-longue—she had moved it there so that she could answer it at any second during the night; and she was still dressed, ready to leave the house at a word.

When would the word come? It was useless to keep telephoning, the police had told her. It was also useless to go into the empty nursery, as she had done so many times.

When Giuseppe came up the stairs with a coffee tray for her she gestured him away, but he stubbornly put it down and said:

"Perhaps the Contessa will want it a little later."

It was unendurable to be fussed over, and with rising anger Luisa watched him move about the room, switching off the lamps, removing the overflowing ash-tray and replacing it with another. Old fool, to have waited for her return last night with a dramatic, hysterical speech that Nina had gone out with the baby and had not come back—and never to have thought of telephoning the police!

The door bell rang, jarring every nerve in her body. It would be the mail, probably. But no—she heard a jumble of voices below, Giuseppe's and another man's. And then a woman sobbing.

They were coming up the stairs towards her—a policeman holding Nina by the arm. Her wrist was bandaged, her head lowered.

She had been found in hospital, the policeman explained.

"The baby?"

The policeman shook his head. The nursemaid had a long story to tell—something concerning English sailors.

"Where is the baby?"

Nina raised her quivering face and Luisa saw that she had a bump on her forehead. Luisa said again, insistently:

"Where is the baby?"

"I do not know."

"Why?"

Then Nina, between sobs, began her story. And it was quite beautiful.

A year ago, it seemed, she had met a handsome English sailor, and they had fallen in love. A rich uncle had died and left him a fortune, and his one desire was to marry her, leave the sea, and settle down. He said he would come back to fetch her—and he had kept his promise. She was the only girl he had ever loved.

Why had she not told the Contessa about this before? It had been on the tip of her tongue to do so many times—especially yesterday evening. However, the Contessa had been so firm, so hard with her! She did not give her time to explain.



Well, the power of love had been too strong for her, and with the baby in her arms she had found herself walking down the street—yes, even then she had obeyed the Contessa's orders, for she had not left Carlo alone.

As if in a trance she had gone down to the quay to meet her future husband——

"How did you know he would be there?"

"I saw his ship in the Gulf."

"Which ship?"

"The big one—the English battleship."

"Yes," said Luisa, at once appealing to the First Lieutenant in her mind. "Yes, go on."

The sailor had arrived with a friend who was passionately fond of children and understood them, being a married man himself, with eight sons. This friend had insisted on holding the baby, who had shown an instantaneous liking for him by clapping its hands, and they had found themselves—pushed forward by the crowd, of course—on the edge of the fairground. What was more natural than that she and her future husband should enjoy themselves for a moment on the swings, keeping the baby always in sight?

But here Fate had stepped in. Something must have broken. The next thing she knew was that she was in hospital. What had happened to the sailors and the baby she did not know.

Luisa looked up at the policeman.

"Is that the story she told you?"

Nina started and glanced over her shoulder nervously. She thought that the policeman had gone.

"She did not tell me as much," he said, and to her astonishment and disgust Luisa saw that he had fallen for the story completely. He was looking at the girl with a compassion that amounted to sentimentality.

Giuseppe had come in with a silver tray, which he handed to the Contessa. On it was a postcard addressed to Nina. Luisa read it at once, eagerly, without the slightest compunction.

And she had to read it again—this curiously off-hand message in a round laborious handwriting—to make sure that it was really true, to convince herself that Carlo was, of all places, aboard the battleship, and in the care of two sailors.

That they would "bring it ashore tomorrow, same time" was not to the point. Something must be done immediately.

Her relief must have been evident in her face, for when she looked up she found that Nina was staring at her anxiously, guessing that this must be some message about the baby.

"I do not apologise for reading your postcard, Nina," she said as she handed it to her. "It concerns me, anyway, far more than you." And then, in an uneven voice: "The sailors took Carlo away with them—to their ship."

Suddenly she had to turn from Nina and the policeman and Giuseppe and walk over to the balustrade, staring out at the Bay. She had not wept so far, but was suddenly carried away by a torrent of emotion. The light grey-green of the battleship looked bone-white in the early morning sun, and the long slow rake of her bows gave delicacy of line. But that grace was the grace of movement, belied by the massive control towers, by the grim fortress that rose from the upper deck.

And incongruously aboard that ship there was a baby six months old!

How could she reach the First Lieutenant? Could a radio message be sent? Perhaps—yes, perhaps someone else would know, and it would not be long now before the British Consulate opened. There was also the possibility that the presence of the baby would at any moment be discovered with horror, and that he would be brought back as quickly as a launch could carry him.

Her sobs quietened. She raised her head. She was full of hope.

“**W**AKEE, wakee, wakee! Lash up and stow!”

The moment that Pincher's eyes beheld the day he knew that he was not going to like it. Not only would there be a desperate, unnerving game of hide-and-seek—and he must whisk the baby out of the Band Instrument Room before the Marines found it—but the thing must be fed and cared for. It must be “looked after proper.”

In this, he could never count on Lofty. Lofty meant well, but Lofty was vague, and, worst of all, Lofty was utterly ham-fisted. His cheerful conviction that everything would turn out all right in the end so long as you didn't worry was no guiding rule for the welfare of babies.

Like many conscientious people, Pincher brooded. He brooded while he lashed up his hammock, and while he shaved and dressed, and then at breakfast, while he listened to the men discussing the latest “buzz”: the Lower Deck lived on rumour and gossip, sometimes wildly wide of the mark, but sometimes so accurate that the officers would have been astonished.

“Sail?” Strikey was saying. “But where to, what's it in aid of?”

“Exercise Clinch,” said Jumper with his usual maddening assurance.

“Never. That ain't nothing to do with us.”

A heated discussion of pros and cons broke out. Now Pincher was brooding more than ever, and even Lofty darted him an anxious glance.

"When are we supposed to sail?"

"Any time now."

"And exercise all by ourselves? Garn, we got no Task Force."

"Any old how," said Lofty, clutching at straws, "there'll be no sailing this morning. Why, we got the V.I.P. coming aboard. We wouldn't be taking him for a ride."

"Why not? Depends how V.I. the ? is, mate!"

"Where's Pincher gone?" asked Whiskers. "He went out ever so sudden."

"Dunno," said Lofty. "Dunno at all."

AT EIGHT THIRTY exactly an immaculate white launch approached to starboard, its polished silver dolphins glittering in the sun. On the prow a sailor juggled expertly with a boathook and then stretched out to hook the gangway. A tall grey-haired civilian in a white suit rose from his seat, leaving his luggage to be carried up by a Petty Officer.

Cleaning a Bofors gun on the platform abaft the Bridge, Lofty and Pincher had a privileged view of the scene—the row of Petty Officers and ratings by the gangway; the Officer of the Watch and Midshipman of the Watch standing stiffly in readiness; the Captain and the Commander, less stiffly, waiting to greet the V.I.P. as he stepped aboard.

"Now they're chipping him one off," observed Lofty as the Officers saluted. "Up comes the P.O. with his kit." A pause, and then: "I can see two bags and a tiddly white hat——"

"Lumme, we got him for keeps. He's going to settle down!"

"All the better," said Lofty cheerfully. "A nice quiet week-end by the sea—do him good."

"I don't like it," said Pincher, going on with his work. "I don't perishing like it."

"Oh, we'll get ashore tomorrow, mark my words."

However, they were not left long in doubt as to their fate, for almost as soon as the V.I.P. disappeared from sight the loudspeakers were blaring from end to end of the ship.

"D'you hear there? D'you hear there? The ship will sail at o-nine-double-o. The ship will sail at o-nine-double-o."

It was then that Pincher realized that he must tell the whole mess. He would never be able to go through this alone.

AND so the great battleship turned her head slowly from the Gulf of Naples and took her fortress and her fifteen hundred men—with one over complement—out to sea. Now and again she dipped ponderously, but the waves did not break over her high-sloping bows. They formed, instead, two enormous glistening folds of sea to port and starboard, smooth folds that scarcely cascaded until they reached her waist, when they foamed suddenly into an icy green that dwindled at last into the white froth of her wake.

A little while passed before Pincher found an opportunity of telling his mates about the baby—not until Stand Easy, when most of them were back in the mess.

"Listen," he said intensely: "You, Stripey—all of you—I got something to tell you and you better hear it now."

"What's the matter, Pinch? Come on, cough it up."

"We—we got a perishing baby aboard."

There was a stupefied silence. Pincher looked down at Stop-Go table and said tiredly:

"And that's that. Well—I'm glad I've told you."

Lofty put in awkwardly:

"And we—we reckon as we're going to need your help."

All at once the sailors exploded.

"A *baby*! Would you Adam-and-Eve it!"

"Where did it come from?"

"How did you get it aboard?"

Then Stripey raised an authoritative hand, silencing them all.

"Boy or girl?"

"Well—a poor little suffering sailor."

"Never heard of anything like this," said Stripey, mashing his jaws.

"A baby in a blooming battle wagon! Where is he now?"

"Let me see," said Pincher, "I takes him out of the Firework Locker, and puts him in the Band Instrument Room. I'm afraid they'll find him there, so I puts him behind some hammocks, but he starts bawling so I puts him in the Sailmaker's Locker and gives him some milk, and that's where he is now, mates."

There was a second's pause and then a stampede—they must all have a look at this extraordinary phenomenon.

If Pincher had tried to sell Carlo to them on the mess deck, he would

probably have screamed and disgraced himself: but surprised on his bed of canvas he was in excellent humour, his fat formless brown legs kicking and his hands plucking purposelessly at the air. He could hardly have introduced himself more pleasantly—or more deceptively.

Then Stripey stooped down and picked up the empty milk jug: it must be refilled as soon as possible for future use. *By that small significant gesture he accepted the child.* The others were still staring. Fat Whacker Payne looked quite terrified of the baby, but it was Whiskers, of all people, who turned slightly soft and with a fatuous grin put out a tentative finger. One sharp look from his mates made him withdraw it sheepishly. There was to be no sentiment.

"Well," said Stripey. "I suppose this one's on the house."

As "hands to work" was piped he closed the door and ran back into the mess with the jug. Pincher was hastily "dhobeying" in a bucket—washing out a succession of large white handkerchiefs.

"What's all them for?"

"Best I can do for nappies."

"How many this morning?"

"Ten. I reckon he's an infant prodigy."

"Never mind, Pinch, the others'll help now. Come to that, I think we'll have to tell *all* the matelots."

"No! For why, Stripey?"

"'Cause it's ten pounds to a havseed that the Captain'll take the V.I.P. on a tour of inspection this morning, and then everybody'll have to help. Meantime, what's your next duty?"

"Masthead Look-out."

"Fine, then—take him up there."

"*Up the mast!*" said Pincher, dizzy with the thought of it. "I couldn't! Why, Stripey, I couldn't even climb the ladder!"

Stripey was stumped, but only for a second.

"All right, then—borrow one of Whacker's great jumpers and stuff him up that. A rope round your waist and you've nothing to worry about. So long, Pinch."

"But, Stripey——"

THE V.I.P. was the Admiral's cross, rather than the Captain's. The Captain would have to endure a certain amount of his company—taking

him round the ship, which was not the Admiral's territory—but the V.I.P.'s business aboard the ship was really with the Admiral, and his place on the Admiral's own enclosed Bridge.

This situation had arisen because there had been an argument going on in Whitehall as to whether battleships were now obsolete or not. By themselves they offered a large target to an enemy; their need for air cover drew off valuable carriers from the fleet, and the carriers themselves needed cruisers and scouting destroyers to protect them. It was felt strongly by the anti-battleship faction that in modern warfare fast heavy cruisers were far more to the point.

The Admiral felt just as strongly that this was an unforgivable heresy. It was not merely because he had been brought up to regard battleships as natural lords of the fleet, but also because he himself had known in two wars what supreme power the battleship was capable of wielding. With much conviction he had argued that the future of British Naval Construction might depend on Exercise Clinch.

The V.I.P. was present as an observer, and his word would carry weight in certain quarters.

More conclusive, however, would be the battleship's own records in action—which would be noted mechanically in a new and highly secret cabin.

In the meantime the Admiral was outlining for the V.I.P. the size and character of the Exercise.

"The rendezvous," he said, "will be at six o'clock. Here"—he indicated the chart before them—"at point X there will be four aircraft carriers, eight cruisers and sixteen destroyers."

The V.I.P. stared at the chart.

"I see. Quite a jolly little party."

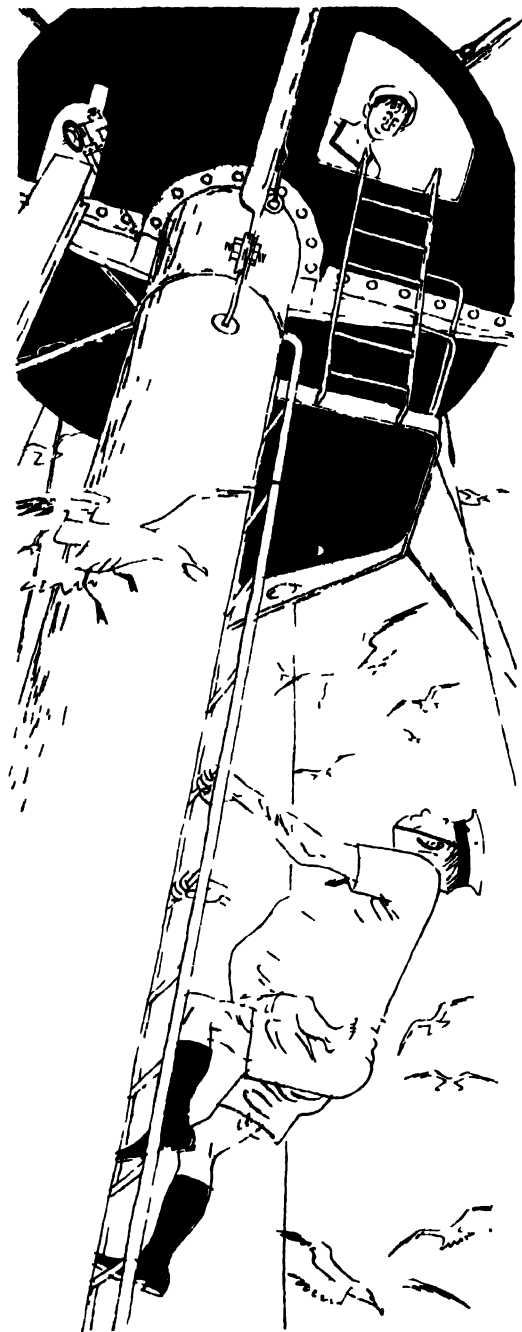
"I hope it won't be too rowdy for you. We are testing the effect on the battleship of every single one of the latest inventions. And now"—he glanced at the waiting Captain's Secretary—"if you are ready, I think that the Captain would be delighted to show you the top Bridge. We shall be meeting again a little later."

PINCHER had had a terrifying journey up the mast—he had always hated this duty anyway. The first lap wasn't so bad, after you'd got used to climbing the hot metal ladder hand over hand, for you were able to

keep your eyes on the mast and ignore the diminishing ship below you. But . . . from the radar platform upward it was a different matter. By some devilment the constructors had decreed that on this last lap you were facing away from the mast—out into dizzy space.

Today, he had started up long before he was due, knowing that he would have to take his time, that instead of clinging closely to the ladder he would have to stretch his arms and stand away from it. He was heavier too, feeling somewhat like a kangaroo with young. The kid, certainly, was safe—so long as he himself was safe. It could not possibly slip out of the jumper with the rope tied tightly round his waist.

In his fear, he started talking to himself on the way up. He found he had to do something to take his mind away from his body. One, two, buckle my shoe, three, four, knock at the door.



Perhaps in some childhood panic he had consoled himself like this, chanting aloud.

At last he reached the Foretop. The flap opened and Knocker White hauled him in. In slow motion his knees gave way and he sat down with his arms aching and his head singing.

"Never been relieved so early in my life," said Knocker White in astonishment. "What's come over you? And what you got up your jumper, half the canteen?"

Untying the rope, Pincher was anxious to discover how the baby had fared—it had been extraordinarily quiet, and this frightened him. Had he suffocated it? But no, it was in perfectly good order. In fact, it began to bawl with annoyance as soon as he released it from its warm contact with his body.

Knocker White wheeled round, startled out of his wits.

"Blimey!" he said, staring at the baby. "Where did that lot come from?"

"Dropped by a passing stork," said Pincher, getting to his feet. "Don't start asking me questions. Lofty'll tell you all about it—and you can tell him to come up in an hour's time with a can of milk and a few more handkerchiefs. I don't mind if I stay here all day, but young Jack's got to be looked after proper."

"O.K.," breathed Knocker, unable to take his eyes off the baby. "I'll tell him. So long."

He took one more incredulous look, and then he was gone.

Stripey had been right—this was obviously the place for the kid. Nobody saw it, nobody heard it, and you could stop it from rolling about too much by keeping your great feet on either side of it. It seemed to enjoy the swaying, and grew quieter again. It made a good cradle, the Foretop—far above the battleship, far above the sea.

He glanced down at the baby and smiled at it for the first time.

"All right, eh?"

SHE SAID haltingly: "It was then that I telephoned the Consulate. I should have known that—it would not really be open yet. But I was out of my mind when I saw the battleship sailing away. . . . I believe I insisted that the British Fleet should be stopped at once!" She looked up. "And then I came here to wait for you."

Carson was watching her with a mixture of emotions. That such an appalling, such an extraordinary thing should have happened to her had put a barrier between them. Today he had no part in her life except as a potential helper; he could not help realizing that their relationship had changed completely overnight.

The absurd postcard from the sailors was in his hands. He let it fall to the desk and said: "Once a battleship has sailed, only the British Admiralty can get it back. But I must at least find out what's happening—there must be *something* one can do."

She said deliberately, for she was exhausted:

"I knew you would help me. There are so many things I must find out at once. Where has the battleship gone? What is it going to do? Will it fire guns?" She looked away in sudden fear.

Carson got up from his chair uncomfortably and walked over to the half-open shutters. He said very gently: "I'm afraid that's what battleships are designed for." Then he turned his head. "But there's one person who can help us. The Naval Liaison Officer."

"I shall go to see him!"

Carson hesitated, remembering that abrupt, middle-aged bachelor, tight-lipped and uncommunicative, who lived in an atmosphere of highly secret ship movements and unmentionable armaments.

"I think you'd better let me tackle him. He's a bit difficult."

She smiled, ruefully. "Which means, of course, that you believe my story but that he would not. It is a little strange, I admit—and perhaps inconvenient for the British Navy. But it is true all the same."

"I'm going to phone him at once."

He went into the inner office. It would have been impossible to make this call in front of her. He said sharply:

"Quick, Pettigrew, jump to it! Give me N.A.T.O. I want the British N.L.O."

How on earth would one begin? More than anything, how could one ever make this sound convincing?

As he told the story to the N.L.O. it seemed more improbable than ever. He found himself gabbling as he approached the difficult hole in the narrative—the gap between the nursemaid's accident and the sailors' postcard. Anybody in their senses would ask what had happened then, and of course the N.L.O. asked it.

"I'm afraid I've absolutely no idea."

Suddenly the N.L.O.'s voice said very tensely, close to the receiver:

"Now, listen, Carson—*take care*. This sounds like a blind to me. This Contessa Marioli's going to start asking you all sorts of questions—where the battleship's gone—and why—and what it's going to do——"

"She already has," said John, reckless with fury. "Aren't they perfectly natural questions to ask? Anyway this *isn't* a blind at all—she has a postcard from the sailors to prove it. Surely there's *something* you could do?"

"Oh, my dear boy, not a thing. The battleship's at sea now—and what makes the whole thing far worse, there's a V.I.P. aboard."

"Yes—I did hear that——"

"Please," said the N.L.O. in fresh alarm, "*please* don't mention names on the telephone!"

"Now listen," said John between his teeth, "can't you possibly tell me how long the battleship's going to be away?"

"Oh—anything from about two days to a week. No, Carson, I'm afraid there's nothing to do but wait. Good-bye."

John stood there for a moment, staring. What on earth could he tell Luisa? Impossible to mention Exercise Clinch—the thought of its dangers would obviously distress her.

She looked up eagerly as he came in, but read his anger and disappointment at once.

"He wouldn't do anything?"

"Said he couldn't. You see, the battleship's on a short summer cruise——"

"How long?"

"Not more than a week."

"*A week!*" Her face and her voice were desolate.

"It could be far less."

She moved towards the door. He opened it for her, and then walked with her to her car. "Please believe that I *shall* help. There must be a chink in the N.L.O.'s armour-plating and I'm going to find it."

"Thank you," she said, without looking at him.

As she drove off he heard his telephone ringing. It was the N.L.O. again.

"Look—I—er—I think I'd better have that nursemaid's name."

The postcard was on the desk. Carson spelt out the name very clearly and precisely. Then he said:

"You can spare me a moment, can't you? I've *got* to see you, and as soon as possible."

"Not a hope, my dear boy, we're up to our eyes!"

John smiled to himself and said quietly:

"You know, I'm surprised that you don't want to see this postcard—for security reasons."

There was a slight pause.

"Read it to me."

"What?" said John, as though outraged. "On the telephone?"

There was another pause.

"Well—er—I might manage a break at about five. Can you meet me—d'you know Zi Teresa?"

This was almost too much. John said cautiously:

"I'll find it. And I'll be there at five."

IT WAS Lofty's fault that Pincher had to bring the baby down again. He appeared suddenly through a flap, in a bad temper.

"Here, what d'you think you're doing, Pincher? You're nothing like due for relief yet."

"Relief? I don't want no relief. All I want——" he stared at Lofty anxiously. "Don't tell me you been and forgot the milk and handkerchiefs?"

"Well, I perishing have," said Lofty, reduced suddenly to shame-faced uneasiness.

"That's torn it. Down we goes again!"

"Garn, can't you leave the kid alone? He looks all right to me."

"Everything always looks all right to you." Pincher picked up the baby. "Makes me hopping mad to think he could have stayed up here all day. But you can't leave a kid without *anything*. Oh, come on, chum, here's Abraham's bosom again."

Lofty helped him; then Pincher opened the flap and started down the ladder. This time, young Jack's weight was in his favour, and the descent did not seem nearly as bad as the climb—its horrors were overlaid, anyway, by the still more awful prospect of trying to escape notice when he reached the deck. He would have to rely on Stripey's having

told the matelots and on their doing their best for him. His greatest danger would be from sharp-eyed Petty Officers.

One more ladder—and already he could hear Blades in full voice, drilling a gun's crew.

"Twenty-five years have I been in the Navy, and this is the very first time I've heard a five-two-five shell referred to as that there blunt-nosed basket!"

Blades was *inside* the gun-turret, fortunately, but how could he possibly skip past the entrance? He caught sight of Nobby Clark, and Nobby caught sight of him. The next moment there was a bang as Nobby dropped the rammer.

Blades leaped back with a roar, for gunnery instructors are in perpetual terror of having their feet crushed by incompetent crews.

"Sorry, Chief."

"Sorry? I'll make you sorry, you clumsy . . . *butterfingers!*"

For a few yards the coast was clear. Pincher hesitated for a second as he came to the door of the Sound Reproduction Equipment, but decided against that useful hideyhole. He had come all the way down here to feed and change the baby, and that was what he was going to do. Besides, he might as well get below while there was nobody in sight.

Nobody? *Only the Captain and the V.I.P.* They came strolling round the fifteen-inch gun-turret deep in conversation. His blood burning in his face, Pincher turned quickly through a doorway and slithered down the ladder.

The milk and handkerchiefs were on the mess table where Lofty had left them. In a few minutes the child, which had begun to complain when Pincher released it, quietened and closed its eyes. It seemed quite oblivious of being changed and of being lifted up to the top of the lockers, where he hemmed it in with piles of ditty boxes. A good place for it, this, but you daren't go away and leave it for fear that it would wake up and cry again, or, worse, that the ship might give a sudden disastrous roll.

JOHN CARSON glanced at his watch and realized he was faced with a dilemma. Last night he had asked Luisa to lunch with him at Zi Teresa, and she had accepted with eagerness. Now, however, it was most improbable that she would have the slightest recollection of the matter.

Did he then wait for her at Zi Teresa, knowing in his heart that she would never come? Or did he go boldly—perhaps unwelcomely—to see her? He had, in any case, an excuse for this: he still had the postcard, her only link with the sailors who had her child, and he did not want to return it to her until he had shown it to the N.L.O. But all that must be explained to her, so he told Pettigrew that he was going out to lunch early, and drove up to Posilipo.

A white-gloved manservant answered the door, and John was immediately irritated by his excessive air of tragedy. Shaking his head, he told John that the Contessa would see no one today. The Contessa was unwell.

"I understand exactly why the Contessa is unwell," said John calmly. "I saw her this morning. Will you kindly give her my card?"

The card was reluctantly taken and he was grudgingly admitted. John watched him turn slowly and walk up the wide marble staircase, and then he glanced round the paved hall, imagining the scene there last night when she returned.

"Mr. Carson!"

She was standing at the top of the staircase, and he ran up to her. She gave him her hand and said anxiously:

"Any news?"

"Not yet. But I thought that at least you'd prefer to be told there was none, than to be left in silence."

"Thank you." She withdrew her hand and looked away. "You will stay for a moment, won't you?"

She turned and he followed her into the terrace-room. He felt at once that it was here that she spent most of her time. It was a very personal room, gay and charming in colour, flooded with light from the terrace beyond.

She motioned him to a chair and sat down. He said:

"You left this postcard——"

"Yes, it was stupid of me—I was not quite conscious of what I was doing."

"Please let me keep it for a little. I want to show it to the Naval Liaison Officer. I'm seeing him at five."

She leaned forward eagerly, her face lighting.

"Splendid! You think he will help?"

"I must make him. If I show him this it may spare you the trouble of being questioned. I hope nobody's tried to do that?"

"Nobody. I have been sitting here alone, staring out at the Gulf. You know, it is extraordinary how vividly you can see what you want to see. The battleship has come back several times——"

"And it'll sneak in at any moment while you're not looking. Unless, of course, the baby's torn up all their charts."

"Just what Carlo would do, if he had the chance."

She smiled then, and he saw that her face had a little more colour. She was gaining faith and courage, and it occurred to him that it would be a good thing if he showed that he realized it.

"I suppose you've been making plans for Carlo and yourself."

She hesitated for a moment, then raised her head.

"Yes—of course you are right. That is the only thing to do. . . . I think we shall leave Naples. My husband had a farm up in the hills, and there is a small *capanna* there that could be repaired for us."

"Tell me about it."

On the table Carson saw a deflated balloon. He picked it up, listening as she told him about the farm, and began slowly to inflate it. It grew like an enormous grape. She suddenly became conscious of it, and stopped. His eyes met hers with a challenge. *At this moment she must not break down.*

"You will need a piece of string, won't you," she said, accepting the useful triviality. She got up and went over to the bureau, rummaging in the drawers. He watched her with admiration, and said:

"Tie it for me, will you? Tightly, please—and now another knot."

She did not ask him why he was doing this; she knew. And she knew that this small irrelevant fuss was far better for her than the view of the Gulf, the binoculars, the solitude. She watched him walk over to the trellis and reach up to tie the balloon there. "For Carlo," she said.

"Yes."

The manservant came into the room and she turned to Carson.

"You will stop for lunch, won't you? I suppose I must pretend to eat something."

"Thank you."

He had been right, then—she had entirely forgotten their engagement. Giuseppe stared hard at the balloon. He was obviously scandalized.



TINNED PEAS and corned-beef rissoles, plum duff with a bright yellow custard . . . Well, it filled you. If you were a British sailor your dream-dish was a vast fry-up—steak with an egg on top and fried potatoes. But except for joints drowned in anonymous gravy, corned-beef kept turning up in various disguises.

The men rested contented elbows on the table and belched and talked about the baby. The mess had been invaded by incredulous sightseers from the Lower Deck that morning, and the mess-mates of Stop-Go began to feel a pleasing sense of importance. Their lives aboard ship always needed some sort of a focusing point—there was always an under-current of longing for some pet or other, or for something to make in their spare time. And now perhaps there was opportunity for both. Someone offered to make the baby a rattle, and Stripey decided to knit something for him. They discussed feeding problems: a pity there was no fresh milk, but tinned milk was probably better than Italian milk anyway.

Well, it had been a nice quiet morning—but where were the Captain and the V.I.P. going next?

“Don’t tell me they ain’t finished that tour of inspection?” Pincher asked anxiously.

“Finished?” said Whacker. “They ain’t hardly begun. Why, the V.I.P. never seen Stripey’s knitting, or Lofty’s photographs, or the bakers putting weevils in the bread. He ain’t seen nothing bar the ship’s cat and a couple of perishing gun-turrets, and it took him a bottle of gin to get over that.”

It did seem, however, that this nerve-racking tour was likely to continue, for until the Exercise began there was obviously nothing to be done with the V.I.P. except walk him off his feet.

Now it was hands to work again. Stripey said to Pincher: “Don’t hang about here too long. The baby’s quiet enough now, but it can’t last. You never know when a P.O. may look in to see if he can find trouble. Try the Galley in half an hour. There’s always a clatter in there.”

It was a good idea. By that time the panic of the midday meal would have subsided. But there would be plenty of noise still—not only a din of metal trays and pans being hurled about, but the incessant roar of the high-pressure steam jets. It was more than enough to cover the bawling of twenty babies.

Hide and seek was no new game in the battleship—it was always going on. Even among the Petty Officers, who, not allowed cabins of their own, were eternally finding little foxholes and digging in temporarily, only to shift again when they thought they were in danger of discovery. Some had to find a new “cabooosh” every two or three days, even that model of discipline Chief Petty Officer Blades.

For some time Pincher stayed in the mess, hidden from the door by the lockers, feeling like a truant schoolboy. The prospect of continued idleness in a ship in which every hand had his duty appalled him. Then somebody came in. Whoever it was went quickly, but left him with the feeling that it would be rash to stay here.

“A couple of gipsies, mate. That’s what we are.”

He picked up the baby, who was still asleep, and in a few moments sidled into the Galley.

The place offered almost endless, if somewhat sinister, opportunities

of hiding something. Huge ovens, their metal now creaking and banging as it cooled, half a dozen giant cauldrons, huge pans in which he could almost have curled himself up. The rapid feeding of fifteen hundred men needed utensils that dwarfed those who used them.

Yes, he could leave the baby in one of a dozen places, and walk away from it. This was the quietest time of day, in the Galley. Even so, there were a few cooks about—and as one of them went over to a switchboard Pincher saw with horror that a large cauldron at which he had been staring with speculative interest was now belching clouds of steam.

One of the cooks saw him, and wheeled round in a fury.

"Listen, nürsic," he shouted, "we all knows about *you*! Go on, now—take that there out of here!"

"Why, we ain't doing no harm."

The cook turned away suddenly, and Pincher was terrified that he was going to send for a Petty Officer; but he wheeled back and, surprisingly, thrust a tin of milk at him.

"Go on now, hop it. Find out where the Captain's been and take him there. Lightning never strikes the same place twice. But don't leave him about in the Galley."

All very well, but it was no easy matter to find out where the Captain had been. This passage was dangerous enough—anybody might come through.

The Captain's voice said, close to his ear:

". . . music and items of news throughout the ship"

Pincher jumped, terrified. The loudspeaker crackled stormily. The voice came back, died to nothing, boomed again.

". . . efficient system . . . *interference*, but on the whole Now what was I going to . . . might *interest* you. . . ."

What was he going to show the V.I.P.? All that was clear was that they had just visited the Sound Reproduction Equipment, and the place they had left was obviously the one place for Pincher. But, just when Pincher said "Now for the S.R.E.!" The Captain must have said "Now for the Galley!"

For as the Captain and the V.I.P. walked briskly along one passage, Pincher was rushing eagerly in their direction, along the one below them. As he reached the bottom of a ladder he halted in terror. The Captain's voice—and *not*, this time, through the loudspeaker. Those

feet, almost on a level with his eyes, must be the Captain's. They had all but collided.

He did what any sailor would normally have done—swung back by the side of the ladder and stood at attention. He also closed his eyes. By the time he dared to open them, the Captain and the V.I.P. were half-way down the corridor.

At first he couldn't believe that they had not even noticed him. For a moment he was almost sick with relief. And then he bolted for the S.R.E. as though the rest of the ship had caught fire.

Jumper Foote, sitting by his set and studying a list of announcements, was only just beginning to recover from the Captain's visit when Pincher burst in.

"Watch out!" said Jumper. "You'll run into the Captain if you ain't careful. He's somewhere on deck."

"He ain't, he's below." Pincher was feverishly untying the baby. "I seen him."

"Seen him? Crikey, did he see you?"

At all costs he must put the thing down and feed it. He opened the marlinspike of his knife and punched two holes in the can.

"Yes, but he was too close, if you see what I mean. If I'd been farther away he'd have took more notice."

He began to feed the baby, spilling some of the milk: but what reached the small wet mouth was evidently welcome. Jumper said firmly:

"Now listen, Pincher, you pack that up—I'm not having it in here."

"Don't turn us out into the snow, mate. We been in the mess, we been in the Galley—I can't stand much more of it."

Clumsy, ludicrous, he leaned over the child. Jumper watched him, grinning. "Kill yourself for that kid, wouldn't you?"

"Don't be daft. It's only that once I start something I got to go on with it, even if it's crazy."

"I reckon we'll all be crazy if you don't find the right place to park it. Why don't Lofty help more?"

"He *is* helping. He's doing my watch, up in the Foretop."

Jumper glanced at the clock. "Well, he'll be down any moment now. And if I was you I'd make him take over." As he put a record on, he said: "I got an idea—Blades's caboosh. Stick it in there."

"What d'you take me for?"

"I mean it. Why, it'd be safe there for at least another hour—Blades is on deck drilling that poor suffering gun's crew."

"Which *is* Blades's caboosh? He keeps changing."

"He's back in the Gunner's Mate's old office."

It would be a bold move, but with Blades on duty it had a lot to recommend it. Better, anyway, than skulking about in one corner after another. For a whole hour, having fed young Jack, he could be free of him.

BUT THE consequences of that hour's respite were disastrous. Ironically, Nobby Clark—who had been of such service to Pincher that morning—played a large part in causing the debacle. The real cause of it was something very small, slender and insignificant. In fact, it could be said with perfect truth that the baby's future hung by a thread.

A thread on the jacket of Chief Petty Officer Blades, a thread which kept his top button in place. A thread that, like the gun's crew he was still drilling, could tolerate only so much invective and no more.

"Call yourself a gun's crew?" he was yelling. "Shall I tell you what I calls you?"

He took too deep and too long a breath. Deadpan Nobby, staring him in the eye, said impassively:

"'Scuse me, Chief—you're improperly dressed. You lost your top button."

There it was, on the deck. Blades glared at him and stooped to pick it up. Minus the top button of his jacket, he was, in naval terminology, "improperly dressed," and it would be just as well not to be seen by any officer in that condition.

He said gruffly:

"All right, then. Stand easy while I change. And when I come back I'll tell you what I *do* calls you."

At the door of his caboosh Blades halted. He wanted to make quite sure that nobody saw where he was going. He had an uncomfortable feeling that some of the lads had already spotted his new hideyhole. Which led to the still more uncomfortable feeling that the Commander might soon get to know of it.

But for the moment there was nobody about, so Blades opened the

door quickly and made straight for the locker opposite. Ripping off the offending jacket, he flung it down on the bunk in the alcove, and opened the locker, where there was a spare uniform on a hanger. There was also a clothes brush in the locker, the remains of a mirror, and a shoe-rag; so Blades was able to render himself dustless and immaculate. Then he turned to the bunk to pick up his discarded jacket.

He was transfixed. Wild thoughts of Indian cobras crossed his mind as he saw the jacket move. Without shifting his feet an inch he leaned over and stretched his hand out very gingerly. He lifted a sleeve by its cuff, then with a sudden whip of his arm flung the jacket into the air.

He gave a strangled scream. For what he saw there was far worse than any reptile. It was a nightmare. It was an abomination. It was a baby.

As though confronted by an unexploded shell which might go off at any moment, Blades snatched it up and rushed out of the door. The shawl was left behind, the nappy carried away as he tore down the passage. Flinging himself towards the deck and daylight, he nearly knocked over a couple of Petty Officers, who gazed at him with disbelief and horror. Quicker in thought than Pincher could ever have been, he then turned through a doorway and made straight for Sick Bay. It was obvious to him that of all places in the battleship Sick Bay was the most suitable. Clearly, a baby was a sort of horrible casualty.

The entrance to Sick Bay was a kind of lobby, used for immediate cases and provided only with a leather settee on which a rating was lying with his eyes shut, stripped to the waist. Through the inner doorway Blades could see a young Sick Bay Attendant mixing what looked like a glass of bismuth.

Blades hesitated only for a second. He had no time for explanations, and in any case, how could he explain? No, this donation to Sick Bay—and the Officers—must be strictly anonymous. The rating on the settee moaned slightly and shifted an arm. The chance was too good to miss. Putting the baby down by the half-conscious figure, Blades turned and fled.

In another moment the Sick Bay attendant came into the lobby with the glass in his hand

AFTER the first shock of Blades's explosion at tea—"Some basket's smuggled a baby aboard, *a real live perishing baby!*"—the expressions

on the Petty Officers' faces differed not a great deal from the expressions in the sailors' mess when Pincher had first made his confession. There was astonishment, disbelief, a sudden nervous uncontrollable laugh, fear, consternation. But there was also a good deal of anger.

For one thing, these were older men, and, for another, they were men with a very strong feeling of responsibility. It is the Petty Officers who govern nine-tenths of the ship.

"Nearly fell over it," Blades was shouting. "Nearly fell over it—lying there in the passage——"

"What passāge?" somebody asked.

"Why, the one by Gunner's Mate's old office. I was just passing. What I want to know," he continued hastily, "is *how* did it happen? And *when* did it happen?"

"Can't have been long ago," said one of the younger Chiefs, "else they'd have been found out before. It must have been"—he faltered with sudden misgivings—"it must have been after yesterday's leave."

Blades turned on him with fiery accusing eyes.

"Yes—and it was you on the gangway, wasn't it?"

"I can't look at everything they bring aboard," said the other uneasily, "else I'd never get 'em all through. So long as there's no liquor——"

"No liquor! Why, I'd rather they brought a barrel than a baby!" Blades gulped down the tea that he had allowed to get cold. "Can't you see what it all leads up to, anyway? Lack of discipline!"

He repeated, as though it were an Abomination Before the Lord, "*Lack of Discipline!*"

The word "discipline" was very rarely used, for it was thought to savour too much of the lash. But discipline was perpetually at the back of every Petty Officer's mind, and the need for it implicit in his relationship with the men.

Blades had not yet finished.

"*And—with Exercise Clinch round the corner!*"

Chief Petty Officer McGinty was of all the Chiefs one of the mildest and most tolerant, but this was about as much as he could stand of Blades.

"Och, the lads'll be all right," he said testily. "Ah've never known a

better lot of men. Baby or no baby, they'll do their stuff when the time comes." He lit a match and drew on his pipe. "What I don't like to think of is the Officers. How are they going to take it when they find out? It can't be long, now, before they do."

THE IRISH Surgeon Captain stood staring out at the horizon with eyes as blue as the sea, wondering why one strong horizontal line always gave one a feeling of calm. A footstep disturbed his thoughts, and a weak voice said close behind him:

"I've been looking for you everywhere, sir."

"Why, Johnson? How's the new patient? No worse?"

"Not exactly worse, sir. Possibly better, sir. At least, I don't quite know——"

The Surgeon Captain turned round with irritation.

"What's the matter, Johnson? Are you all right?"

The Sick Bay Attendant was looking decidedly groggy, his mouth slackly open and his eyes twitching.

"I think I'd like you to come and see for yourself, sir."

"Great guns, what is all this about?"

He turned and strode towards Sick Bay, frowning with annoyance. As he entered the lobby the first thing that caught his outraged eye was broken glass and a white pool of magnesium trisilicate on the deck. And the second thing was a naked baby, kicking fretfully beside the sick rating.

He stared at it, fascinated. He did not move or utter.

"You see what I mean, sir?"

"Yes," said the Surgeon Captain at last. "Yes, I see what you mean. But I don't believe it all the same."

"In the meantime, sir," said Johnson, almost breaking down, "what do we *do* with it?"

"I haven't a clue." He had an irresistible desire to laugh, then he said quietly: "You know, Johnson, there are times in one's life when there is only one possible course of action."

"What is that, sir?"

"Walk—out—very—quietly," said the Surgeon Captain, "and—shut—the—door."

And that was what he did.

AT A FEW minutes to five John Carson arrived at Santa Lucia and walked down the deserted steps to the empty restaurant by the little port. At this hour nobody tried to sell him flowers, and the fisherman's shell-encrusted booth, from which Zi Teresa's seafood always came, had been scrubbed down and abandoned. It was the wrong time for Zi Teresa—which was, of course, the reason why the cautious N.L.O. had chosen it.

In a far corner of the restaurant an ancient waiter had collapsed in an attitude of hopelessness with his head on his crossed hands. He jumped to life as John touched his shoulder.

"I want a litre of white wine, please—dry, cold, but not iced."

As the waiter shuffled away, John could not help glancing at the empty chair beside him.

Well—his visit to Luisa this morning had not been fruitless. He had at least been able to show her the courage that she herself possessed, and had been rewarded by the sight of her waving to him from the balcony, tearless and hopeful.

He looked up as the waiter arrived with the carafe, and at the same moment the door was opened by an elderly distinguished-looking man who wore his good civilian clothes as though they were a concession to a life of which he knew very little, a kind of fancy dress.

"Hallo, Carson. Sorry I'm adrift, but the signal traffic's terrible." He stared at the carafe. "White wine, eh? Well, harmless, why not?" He held up two fingers to the waiter, pointing to John's glass.

Agitated though he had sounded on the telephone, he seemed now to be no more than a little abrupt. He must have made up his mind already whether to accept or reject the story, but it would probably take a little while to find out which.

John poured out a glass and looked up to find the N.L.O. staring at him with a kind of cautious curiosity. Yes, this was certainly going to be difficult.

"Damned good party last night."

John said lightly:

"Yes, I enjoyed it. How many different nationalities were there? Most of the naval uniforms looked alike to me, so I decided that the sea was a country on its own."

"And sailors a race in themselves? Something in that. At sea they all speak the same language, but ashore . . . no, quite a different matter.

They're all separated into nationalities again—and *only too anxious to discover one another's business*. Don't trust 'em, especially when an interesting British warship appears in the Gulf. I understand you know the First Lieutenant."

"Yes," said John, taken aback. "I've known him for years."

"And the lady in question?"

"Only since last night."

"I see."

John looked up.

"Are you implying that she's some sort of a foreign agent who has thought of a very original way of getting information?"

"Have I implied such a thing?"

"Well, you did this morning, on the telephone."

"Oh, damn the telephone," said the N.L.O. testily. "It should only be used for giving orders. Anyway, that's why I suggested meeting here, so that we could talk reasonably."

"I'm perfectly prepared to do that," said John, and added, "for my part."

They each took a sip from their glasses. It was about time that they both counted ten And then the N.L.O. said mildly, almost defensively:

"I know it's difficult for you, but do try to put yourself in my place. You tell me an improbable story; next, you say you have an anxious mother asking you all sorts of questions. You must admit that there's some reason for caution."

"I suppose you're worried because she was at the party, among all those foreign naval officers. Does she usually keep such highly disreputable company?"

The N.L.O. sniffed gunpowder, and paused.

"No, she seems to lead a very quiet life. But I suppose that isn't surprising."

"What do you mean by that?"

"About a year ago her husband was killed in a car crash with one of his mistresses. There was a bit of a scandal at the time."

John was silent for a moment, then turned to the N.L.O. and said directly:

"Since you know so much about her, you must know that she has

a child. Is it likely that she would go to the fantastic length of using it to get information? In short—do you believe this story or don't you?"

"Reluctantly—yes."

"Then perhaps," said John calmly, taking the postcard out of his pocket, "this will remove some of the reluctance."

When the N.L.O. had read the message he looked up and said reflectively:

"Wonder what those two chaps are like. Lofty, of course, could be absolutely anybody over medium height. Pincher's name would be Martin—Martins are always 'Pinchers' in the Navy. Still, that doesn't get us very far." He gave the card back. "What a thing to have happened."

"Yes," said John quietly as he put the card away. "Try to imagine what the suspense must be like. Two days will seem an eternity."

The N.L.O. turned his head quickly, and smiled.

"Trying to bowl me a fast one, are you? Very well, then—she should be back in port at noon tomorrow."

"As soon as that! Thank God! Can I pass this on to the lady concerned?"

"Why," said the N.L.O., amused, "do you imagine I told it you? But nobody else, please. I can rely on you?"

"On one condition. Will you send a signal?"

"Well . . . I could. But what a signal to have to send!" The N.L.O. sighed apprehensively. "Time to think about it, anyway—we can't break wireless silence until after ten o'clock. If you rang me at H.Q. at about half past——"

"I'll ring," said John.

"Good." The N.L.O. rose to his feet and leaned over the table. "Since your interest in this matter is obviously more than academic," he said stiffly, "may I wish you luck?"

"Thank you."

With amusement, even with elation, John watched him go. This interview had been more rewarding than he had dared to hope. His first instinct was to rush for the telephone, but suddenly he halted. He could not possibly use a telephone—the N.L.O. would have gone up in flames at the thought of it—so for the second time that day he drove up to Posilipo.

AND NOW the Officers knew. Not all of them yet—just a small startled group by the Wardroom fire-place, standing round the limp seated figure of the Surgeon Captain.

"It was the first time in my life," he was saying, "that I've been completely foxed, and I don't mind admitting it. What could I do?"

"I can hardly believe this, Doc," said the Commander, staring into space as though shock had deprived him of the power to focus his eyes. "Who smuggled the thing aboard? And *why*? A dim sort of joke, I'd have thought, on the verge of an exercise."

"But they didn't know that," said the First Lieutenant, quickly. "We sprang it on them." He could not resist a chuckle. "Anyway, they must have fairly gone through the hoop while the Old Man was prowling round with the V.I.P."

The Commander's frown deepened. "You know," he said, "what worries me is this. Supposing the ghastly story got out, where would we be? We'd never live it down!" Just as that difficult and much-to-be-avoided word *Discipline* was at the back of the Petty Officers' minds, so *Prestige*, equally delicate, was at the back of the Officers'.

"Listen, Number One," said the Commander, "the very first thing we've got to do is to send for Chief Petty Officer Blades. If there's one thing Blades knows—it's how to handle the Lower Deck."

BELOW, Blades was already handling the Lower Deck in his own fashion, storming into one mess after the other, glaring, roaring, threatening, but eliciting nothing but stony denials. It was at least quite obvious to him that everybody knew about it. It was scarcely possible, however, to put the entire population of the battleship on charge. Somewhere or other there was a culprit, and he must be found.

As soon as he came to Stop-Go mess he knew that he was on the right track, for they all looked as though they expected hell to break loose.

"*Who done it?*" he demanded, looking through narrowed eyes from one to the other. "Come on, now—I can see it was one of you."

There was a terrified silence. And then Stripey got up from the bench.

"Why, we all done it, Chief," he said.

"*What?*"

It was conscience that made Lofty get up too, but even at this moment he could not help swaggering a little.

"I won't have my mates put in the rattle," he said defiantly. "Not for my sake. *I* done it."

"That ain't right neither, Chief," said Pincher quietly and sorrowfully, raising his head. "*I* done it."

Confused, visibly swelling with rage, Blades glared from one to the other.

"Blow me down, don't you even know *which* of you done it? Then I'll put you *all* in the rattle!"

Suddenly the loudspeaker entered the argument in its grey official monotone:

"Chief Petty Officer Blades to report to the Commander's cabin immediately."

Blades gave a vindictive scowl round the mess, with special reference to Lofty and Pincher. He could do no more at the moment than obey the voice of authority.

ACCORDING to naval routine, the Officer of the Day had had to be brought into this. He was a smooth-faced Sub-Lieutenant who looked even less than his twenty-five years. His duty, which he took very seriously, occasionally gave him a slight air of pomposity, which was by no means natural to him. Almost as soon as the extraordinary situation had been explained to him, however, he became by contrast a gleeful schoolboy, as though somebody had just put a tin-tack on the headmaster's chair. He could not help asking the Commander:

"Will Blades know about this, sir?"

"Bound to, Sub. It's nearly an hour since the thing was found, and I expect the gay news spread like wildfire."

Cap under arm, and a little breathless, Blades appeared.

"You sent for me, sir."

In these surroundings Blades was a different man. His eyes had a certain directness and simplicity, and his mouth, so often drawn into a sidelong snarl, was now set firmly in a sort of stubborn purposefulness. Standing before his masters, he looked what he really was—a good stout leathery Chief Petty Officer, passionately devoted to his Service, and deeply aware of his responsibilities.

"Yes," said the Commander, "I sent for you." He paused, fingering his cuff. "I think I'd better tell you at once that we've all, barring the

Captain and the V.I.P., and of course the Admiral, discovered this regrettable lapse, this unhappy event."

"Yessir," said Blades, rigid and impassive.

"Do you realise, Blades, that we are aboard the finest and newest capital ship in the world?"

"Yessir."

"Do you realise, Blades, that the success of this capital ship depends upon the complete and undistracted discipline of the men?"

"Yessir."

"Do you realise, moreover, what we would all of us lose in—umm—*Prestige*, if this appalling story got about?" The Commander levelled his eyes on Blades. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

Blades ran the tip of his tongue over his rough lips.

"I hadn't thought of *Prestige*, sir, begging your pardon, sir. I *had* thought of—er—*Discipline*, and I'd like to say this." He looked away from the Commander. "You see, I know my men, sir—begging your pardon, *our* men. And I'm not afeared to say in front of anybody that in Exercise Clinch those sailors, every man Jack of 'em, will behave just as you'd want, sir, same as if Lord Nelson himself was aboard." He fingered his cap, then hastily put it back under his arm. "I reckon that's all I can say, sir."

They were staring at him, the Sub-Lieutenant with undisguised astonishment.

The Commander said abruptly:

"Very good, Blades. That's just what I wanted to hear. But it'd better be true."

"Yessir."

"Later—after the Exercise—I expect you to tell me the name of the culprit. But not, perhaps, at the moment."

Blades looked at him with respect.

"Very wise, if you forgive me saying so, sir."

"Very good, Blades. You can go."

After he had left, the Sub-Lieutenant said suddenly:

"Well, the old battle-axe! Would you ever have believed he'd stick up for the men like that?"

"Yes, I would, Sub," said the First Lieutenant, with an indulgent smile. "You're young in the Navy!"

The Commander said quietly, as he turned to leave the cabin :
"It'll be any moment now."

Suddenly, throughout the ship, the klaxons roared their nerve-tearing alarm.

III

WITHIN less than a minute, fifteen hundred different things had happened. For every man had his action station and ran straight to it, as unthinking as a trained animal at the crack of a whip. At the first sound of that deafening clangor every man's individuality was gone. He no longer had a name. He had a number. Everything that he had been up to that moment was forgotten in the urgency of that one function to which he had been trained for so long.

Perhaps the First Lieutenant had to be quicker than any man in the ship, for he had a double duty to perform. It had struck him that the baby must be put in some place where it could not possibly come to any harm, and where nobody would be distracted by it.

Even as he reached Sick Bay, a certain key was already in his hand. Johnson, who had been feeding the baby, now started up in alarm, uncertain whether he should continue or rush to his post. *This was exactly what must be avoided.* Without a word the First Lieutenant snatched the child and disappeared with it.

It took only a few seconds to reach the door of the H.S.7, that Secret Cabin which in the next few hours would be the scene of great activity—but of non-human activity. Nobody was needed there. Mechanical limbs took down the calculations of mechanical brains, and the whole Exercise would be recorded, so that the Captain, the Admiral, and ultimately their Lordships would have a complete and accurate plan of the whole proceedings.

To one side was a wide tray-like shelf, and it was here that the First Lieutenant left the baby. He locked the door on it with relief.

As he reached the top Bridge the klaxons stopped. There was a strange silence in which every man suddenly heard his own breath, and a voice said tonelessly: "Enemy force green five—fifteen miles."

The Captain was raising his binoculars. There was smoke on the

horizon, to which would be attached very shortly the outlines of eight racing destroyers. He said:

"Alter course to one-eight-O."

"Steer one-eight-O, sir."

Silence again as the fifteen-inch guns raised their gigantic barrels, slowly, menacingly.

From aircraft carriers not yet in sight a formation of jet planes arrived, splitting the sky suddenly with a high-pitched whine. As it developed into a hellish scream that seemed to tear the brains out of your head, the pom-poms were punching the air, the Bofors guns were spitting, and the high-angle small-calibre guns opened up with a bark that was in itself like a physical blow. As dummy bombs and torpedoes fell, giant white vengeful fists rose up from the sea on all sides.

From then onward, as the "enemy" ships began to close in, a pandemonium ensued that seemed to have no pattern or meaning. Only after some time did a little of the progress of the Exercise become apparent to the eye. The battleship, open to attack by waves of jet aircraft, was at the same time keeping a line of "enemy" ships at bay with the range of her heavy guns, a double defence complicated at every second by the need to take avoiding action as the destroyers' torpedoes churned blue water into lines of icy green.

So far the battleship had undergone every test that she might have to face if war broke out today. But it was the war of tomorrow that was the concern of the Admiral and of Exercise Clinch. New weapons now joined the guns—guided rockets that made their departure heard even above the thunder of a broadside and leaped flaming into the air.

To an onlooker, who had never seen a naval action before, the Exercise became once more incomprehensible. It is impossible to watch for more than a few seconds the progress of a missile travelling at over two thousand miles an hour and rising to over fifty thousand feet in order to tackle bombers flying faster than sound . . .

THE ADMIRAL had expressive shoulders. You could have told by that slight lift followed by that slight droop that the Exercise was over, that he was worn out, and that he was also content.

He was content in a way that was typical of a British naval officer of his experience and rank. It did not depend on the fact that in a short

space of time ^{he} had been able to demonstrate something which he had tried to tell the Admiralty for years—that battleships were still vitally necessary. That was merely a personal triumph which he would enjoy later.

No, his immediate response was something quite different and completely unselfish—a joy in the fact that this living ship under his feet had behaved herself beautifully. A job well done—*that first*. His next pleasure was that he could congratulate the Captain whole-heartedly.

He lifted the Bridge telephone and did so, in his almost expressionless voice, and heard in reply an almost equally expressionless “Thank you, sir.”

Still glowing with satisfaction, he turned his head—and nearly gave a cry of horror.

The V.I.P. looked like a ghost.

For the moment the Admiral had completely forgotten his presence. He would have preferred twenty more broadsides to the vision of this ghastly civilian. He pulled himself together quickly, however, and while he was trying to remember what on earth the fellow was doing here, shot his cuffs and stuck out his chin. Oh yes, of course—the future of the Battleship in Naval construction. V.I.P.—Whitehall—all that. But no point in arguing about that now. Fellow looked as though he needed a stiff brandy.

As the Admiral opened his mouth to address him, legs descending the ladder told him that the Captain’s Secretary was again coming to the rescue. The Captain, exhausted though he must be, had yet to show the V.I.P. that the whole action had been automatically plotted.

“I’m sorry,” said the Admiral. “Perhaps we ought to have given you ear-plugs. Are you all right?”

“Fine, actually.”

“I believe the Captain has a surprise for you. We shall meet again, I hope?”

“I’ve been *most* impressed,” said the V.I.P., with a ghostly thank-you-for-having-me smile, and turned to follow the Captain’s Secretary.

“**MAY** I REPEAT the Admiral’s congratulations?”

“Thank you,” said the Captain, still expressionless. It took time to uncoil oneself and become human again. “But we haven’t finished with

you yet. We haven't shown you our Secret Cabin in which the whole thing has been already plotted—the H.S.7. I believe you said you knew about it?"

"Actually, I do. But I've never seen it working."

The Captain turned to the First Lieutenant, and for a second he thought he saw him staring at the Commander with an expression of horror. "Number One!"

"Sir!"

The First Lieutenant wheeled round smartly.

"H.S.7's rather your pigeon, I think. You'd better come with us."

"Aye, aye, sir."

His voice sounded strained, too—they were all of them, of course, suffering from strain. But as the Captain preceded the V.I.P. down the ladder he could not help wondering what on earth the First Lieutenant had been trying to convey to the Commander. It had looked like a mute appeal, but an appeal for what? What *could* have happened? It would be a monumental tragedy if the machine had failed to function. "Isn't it here, Number One—the cabin?"

"Sorry, sir. Yes, sir."

"From the outside," explained the Captain to the V.I.P., "an ordinary cabin, though it's never been used in quite this way before."

He tried the handle.

"Locked—but of course. The key, Number One?" The First Lieutenant was fumbling with a tinkling bunch. "Thank you. Now you know how to explain this, don't you? Let me take a back seat for once—let me pretend I know absolutely nothing of what I'm going to see." (There was nothing like responsibility for making a man pull himself together.) "No, that's the wrong key, Number One, it's perfectly obvious. Give me the bunch, give me the bunch."

A second's fumbling. The lock turned smoothly and the Captain said:

"That's it. Here we go." But then, still holding the handle, he turned back and said to the V.I.P.: "At least I don't need to explain to you that this is one of the very finest achievements of modern progress—one of the latest, too. How old is it, Number One?"

The First Lieutenant took a deep breath, feeling that it would be almost his last. He said firmly:

"About six months, sir—I think."

"Six months," said the Captain. "Well—it ought to be in good working order."

He opened the door and went in.

Then he came out.

He closed the door behind him, and his face was ashen. He darted the First Lieutenant one brief annihilating glance, and said to the V.I.P.: "Did you tell me you'd *seen* this?"

"Heard about it, actually, and saw the blueprints. In Admiralty."

"Fascinating. Well——" The Captain's eyes strayed hopefully to the ladder behind them . . . If only Vesuvius would erupt at once—something—anything. "Well, it's highly technical, you know. I don't want you to be bored."

"*Bored?*" said the V.I.P., with an unexpected laugh. "I certainly haven't been *bored* since I set foot in your ship." The wretched man seemed to have got his second wind. "Actually, I'm ready for anything now!"

At that moment the Captain fully understood the First Lieutenant's terrified glance at the Commander. Clearly, only he could save them now. But in what form could help arrive?

A Sub-Lieutenant, evidently sent post-haste from the Bridge, shouted before his feet came down the ladder: "Helicopter astern, sir!"

Inexpressibly relieved, the Captain said:

"There—your transport! No time! It seems that we have to say good-bye already. Never mind. Perhaps on another occasion?"

Firmly he led the V.I.P. down the passage. But not before he had given the First Lieutenant one more broadside from under his eyebrows, with a muttered: "*Take it away, take it away!*"

Scarlet in the face Number One raced into the cabin and re-appeared with the baby, which he thrust into the arms of the startled Sub-Lieutenant. "Quick! Get it below!"

The Sub turned and ran on deck. He thrust the baby at a passing Midshipman, who ran with it to the next man in sight. If the Captain, who was firmly propelling the V.I.P. in the opposite direction, had chanced to look back, he would have seen a small pale parcel, unidentifiable at such a distance, being passed from one to another and disappearing at last into obscurity.



THE MOUSE was on the mat—the mouse being Number One, and the cat the Captain. Not that the mouse, whatever he was feeling, showed the slightest signs of being intimidated. He was saying in an even tone—not too casual, but reasonable and conciliatory: “Oh, but surely, sir—couldn’t we put it in the log? ‘One over complement?’ After all, that’s happened before—a man drafted to the wrong ship——”

“A *man*, yes,” snapped the Captain, as he prowled up and down behind his table, “but not a *baby*. Even if it is of the male sex. Can’t you see that this is perfectly disastrous? Ruined everything, of course—everything.”

“Forgive me, sir—but why? The Exercise was obviously an enormous success. Even the V.I.P. said so, didn’t he? We all know that the ship’s won her laurels. Doesn’t that matter most, sir? Though I suppose it matters most, in the end, that every single man aboard this ship knows he’s helped her to win them.”

The Captain’s enthusiasm broke through his unwillingness to give the day as a whole his blessing. “They were all magnificent—splendid team work, there’s no doubt of it. Efficiency . . .” He picked up a paper-weight. “I don’t think our friends ashore know quite how much that means.” He threw the paper-weight down with a crash. “Still the fact remains that I shall not—repeat *not*—be able to conceal this incident from the First Sea Lord.”

Number One decided to take a chance—a desperate chance; he said:

“I should think the First Sea Lord would love it, sir. It’s a good joke on us. It only needs a quiet corner and a glass of gin.”

It was impossible to judge the Captain’s reactions to this practical suggestion, for he said slowly, impersonally:

“The men concerned—you know their names?”

The bow of Number One’s slim body tautened. “I do now, sir.”

Abruptly the Captain said: “Very good. *They’re under arrest.*”

The First Lieutenant said tonelessly:

“Aye, aye, sir. But on what charge?”

Not an easy question, that, and the Captain’s momentary hesitation was a sign of hope. But he said without looking up:

“Breach of discipline.”

“Aye, aye, sir.” The First Lieutenant turned stiffly and left the Captain’s cabin.

Breach of discipline—what did that mean? It was merely a useful phrase. It could incur almost any sort of punishment, from ninety days' detention to two days without your rum tot! His heart warmed towards the Captain. He was "all right." He had to do his job, and maybe he could have done it a good deal more harshly. They were all marking time, there was no doubt of it. Racking their brains.

Number One went towards the broadcasting equipment, almost outside the Wardroom—where, no doubt, they had been busily speculating about his interview with the Old Man.

"Martin!"

Yes, the shape was unmistakable—or rather, the shapelessness. At the moment, bending over as he was, listening at doors, Pincher Martin looked like an ill-filled sack with something on its mind.

"*Martin!*"

Pincher jumped to attention so guiltily that his hand shot up twice in an unnecessary salute.

"Beg pardon, sir."

"What on earth d'you think you're doing?"

There was something in this man's eyes that was disturbing. They were far from crafty, in spite of his nefarious occupation. Not very intelligent, but innocent, direct, and somehow very likeable.

Pincher said candidly:

"I was listening, sir,"—there was the ghost of a hopeful smile—"I just wanted to know where the little old baby was now."

The First Lieutenant said sharply: "Is *that* the way to go about it?"

"No, sir. Sorry, sir." Pincher looked down miserably. "May I go below, sir?"

"Yes." Number One saw Pincher turn away, disconsolate and awkward. "But, Martin——"

"Sir?"

Number One hesitated. There was so little anybody could do now.

"When you do go below—I'd like you to go to the Sick Bay Attendant, and tell him——"

"Yessir?"

"Tell him—oh, tell him anything you like!"

"Aye, aye, sir," said Pincher, not very quick in the uptake. And then, the reason for this mission dawning on him: "Oh, *thank* you, sir!"

He was beaming. But, alas, that would not quite do. Number One had to say warningly: "But I'd advise you to be very quick about it. For you'll shortly be required—elsewhere."

Somehow that piece of news seemed to be registered more quickly. Pincher turned and ran.

"**D**'YOU HAVE to barge in like this?" said Johnson, furious, feeding the baby. "Haven't I had enough shocks for one day?"

Pincher went down on his knees and took one of the child's curled, incapable-looking hands in his.

"Perisher," he said, "you little perisher, I just wanted to know where you was, that's all. We was all wondering, all of your mates. We didn't mean you no harm—we was just worried." The child pulled its hand away with a fretful jerk. "All right, no offence intended. I was just thinking—you been up in the Crow's Nest and down in the Galley. So what about a bit of *Seamanship Manual Number One*? You'd be right on the job then, like me and Lofty."

"You and Lofty!" said Johnson, derisively. "You two have got something coming to you now, and mark my words!"

"Don't need to tell me," said Pincher. "I knows it all right."

"N.A.T.O."

"Will you put me through to the British N L O, please? My name's Carson—of the British Consulate. He's expecting a call from me."

"Maybe that'll help. Stick around."

"Is that the N.L.O.?"

"Carson, I'm up to my eyes."

"Tell me, did you send that signal? Have you heard anything?"

"Let me have a look—they're still de coding the signals. Wait a minute, this must be it. Not much, I'm afraid——"

"What does it say?"

"Well, it begins 'NEW ENTRY'—you realise, of course, that they're referring to the—er——"

"Yes, I know. But what *about* the 'new entry'?"

"NEW ENTRY IN GOOD SHAPE BUT WHOLE SHIP IN UPROAR THIS MUST NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN."

"Oh, thank God!"

"I hope, Carson, that the last remark—about it's never happening again—is taken seriously. Hallo? Carson, are you there?"

"Yes. Sorry. Just repeating signal to New Entry's mother."

"Naturally. But I don't quite know why you're laughing."

"Pleasure, N.L.O. Just pleasure."

"**MARIOLI?**" said the Commander. "Luisa, Contessa Marioli? Where did you get it from? Surely not from the men?"

"No, sir. They knew only the nursemaid's name, and one of them knew the address. But if you look up the N.L.O.'s signal——"

"Oh, yes." The Commander turned over the First Lieutenant's report and studied the signal attached to it. "What a signal, eh? I never expected to see anything like *this* in the course of my naval career."

The First Lieutenant hesitated. The whole affair had perhaps given him more shocks than anyone else in the ship. Trouble now surrounded him, surrounded also those two poor citizens, Baines and Martin, who were being detained in the ship's cells until their future had been decided. And now there came this further shock. Luisa, Contessa Marioli! Weren't there *other* mothers in Naples to whom this might have happened?

At last he ventured quietly: "I know Contessa Marioli, as a matter of fact—I know her quite well, sir."

"I see. How perfectly extraordinary." The Commander's mouth twitched wickedly as he looked up at Number One. "In that case, you must obviously handle the matter of the return. However"—he bent over the report with a frown—"there is still the matter of these two sailors. I don't think you're very happy about *them*, are you?"

"No, sir, I'm not," said Number One. "In fact, I don't think I've ever disliked doing my duty before."

A Petty Officer came into the Wardroom at that moment, and handed the Commander a signal. The Commander took it and said, rising to his feet: "Well, Number One, it's duty anyway. These two men, Baines and Martin—they're all right, are they?"

"Excellent, sir. Two of the best."

"Very good. Then I'd better take your report to the Captain at once. We'll soon be in the Gulf."

The Commander, on his way out of the door with the full report in

one hand, read the signal which the Petty Officer had just given to him. Suddenly he turned back and said in a booming voice which he had probably not used for years: "*Hold everything!* Don't move, any of you! Just listen to this! It's from the V.I.P.!"

Everybody in the Wardroom jerked round, startled more than anything by the tone of the Commander's voice.

"PERFORMANCE OF SHIP," he read slowly, "NOT ONLY BEYOND CRITICISM BUT BEYOND PRAISE CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OFFICERS AND ALSO TO OTHER RANKS WOULD SUGGEST SPLICING MAINBRACE BUT SINCE THIS IS ROYAL-PREROGATIVE SUGGEST INSTEAD SPECIAL LEAVE AND AMNESTY FOR ALL DEFAULTERS——"

The Commander paused then, looking across the Wardroom at the First Lieutenant, and saw him smile. He continued:

"——OR MEN ON CHARGE AND WILL INFORM ADMIRALTY GREAT SUCCESS."

There was silence; all eyes were upon him. "The signal has, of course, the full distribution—to their Lordships, Admiralty, C.-in-C.—everybody. I don't think it specifically mentions our Number One——"

There was a laugh. Everybody still stared at the Commander, who was balancing in either hand the report and the signal, as though they had equal weight. He called out to the First Lieutenant: "D'you know, what with one thing—and another—I've a feeling you're going to win this game, Number One. And may I say I'm as glad as any of us?"

The Surgeon Captain got up and put a friendly hand on Number One's shoulder. "And how," he said loudly, "are you proposing to get that baby off this ship without the whole of the world knowing?"

MORNING in the Gulf, the dull chalky glistening of tumbled Naples in the early searching sun—every kind of Naples, too, the few low places and all towering or tormentedly climbing districts, except of course the veiled and uncommunicative port which put its enigmatic shutters over part of the shore

The great British battleship stood with solid dignity, and into the launches all manner of things were being loaded.

"Steady, there—*steady!*"

What came over now? Everything was of course labelled "Urgent,"

that was always the way of it. There was "British N.I.O.—Urgent," and there was "H.M. Ships' Mail—Urgent." There were several jingling bottle-filled crates which were, no doubt, also urgent. There was a comfortably large wicker laundry basket labelled "Urgent"—and labelled also, "This Side Up, With Care."

Care was taken. It was quite extraordinary how much care was taken of that wicker basket as it descended into the launch, its progress slow, from one man to another—almost reluctant. The lid of the basket was propped open by a wooden chock.

And Carlo's mates? If there was a flicker of a smile on Blades's leathery face as he looked down from the ship, it was only momentary. Old Stripey was looking out from the port-hole immediately below him, fingering a half-finished pair of blue rompers which he was slowly starting to unravel. As for Carlo's other mates, there were not many to witness his going, for at this time there was a great deal to be done aboard ship. For Lofty and Pincher it was a very different matter, for they were lucky enough—it seemed a miracle to them—to be down in the launch itself. Jimmy the One (and could you ever find a better?) seemed to have arranged it.

When Pincher raised the lid of the basket for a second, he was startled to see that someone had made the kid a sailor cap with the proper tally-ribbon. For some reason it made the baby look wildly drunk, but that was perhaps not surprising, for it had dawned on Pincher that in their own peculiar way young children are always tipsy anyhow.

NINA saw the boat first and pointed it out to her mistress. Dazed, over-anxious, Luisa had not immediately understood that there was a launch leaving the side of the battleship. "She's right," said John. "Steady now—we've quite a little while to wait."

And time was cruel. For ages it seemed that nothing whatever was happening. You would have said that the boat arrived in jerks. It was miles away, it was suddenly half-way here and you could see an English sailor fling wide open the lid of a basket, and simultaneously the First Lieutenant raising his hand in greeting. Another jerk and it was practically here—it *was* here, alongside the port! The basket was left behind and there was Carlo, miraculously intact and hiccoughing wildly.

"Carlo, Carlo, *piccino* . . ." She took the child, then burst into tears

and laughter at the same time, and Nina, murmuring soft and incomprehensible things, took him from her quietly.

Luisa, through her emotion, became suddenly aware of the presence of the First Lieutenant. What should she say? She blew her nose and ventured: "I can't say it—I can't—but you must all of you have been so kind. I do hope that the baby was not a nuisance?"

"Of course not," said Number One, lying valiantly. "A nuisance? Why, we loved every minute of it!"

He noticed that in her distraction she had turned to John Carson, and had put a hand on his arm to steady herself. Oh, so that was it—John Carson whom he had introduced to her! He could well have murmured, in retaliation for a remembered remark: "You shore jobs get all the luck, don't you?" But why make people think that sailors were bitter . . . even if they sometimes thought they had reason to be?

Luisa gave a little scream, startling them both.

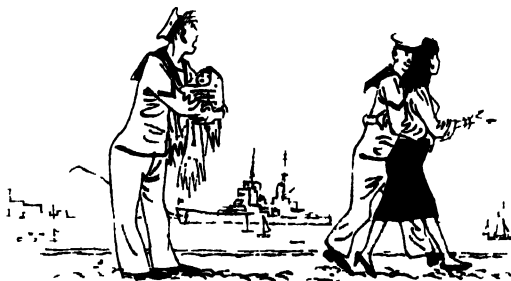
"The baby! Do not tell me I have lost the baby *again*! Where *is* he?"

They all looked along the quay and witnessed what was in its way a very ordinary scene—a nursemaid holding a baby, and two British sailors. The only unusual thing about it, for those who knew them, was that on this occasion Pincher took the baby from Nina's arms and planted it firmly in Lofty's.

"Here, Pincher!" Lofty was shouting in dismay, as his mate walked away with Nina. "Pincher, Pincher, you can't do this to *me*!"

The First Lieutenant strode away purposefully. You could rely on him to deal with the situation.

As for John—when John turned to look at Luisa, he reflected that if she had other children, as he certainly intended she should, they must always be kept far, far away from this exciting but difficult sea.



Anthony Thorne



ANTHONY THORNE was born in London and was educated at St Paul's School and Keble College, Oxford. He first worked as a copywriter in an advertising agency, and then, to escape the tyranny of the office desk, went off to Spain for a holiday, there collecting experience and material for his first novel. This was *Delay in the Sun*, which was an immediate success, gaining a Book Society Recommendation, an *Evening Standard* "Choice," and a Literary Guild Choice in America.

Other novels followed, but Anthony Thorne's career as a writer was interrupted by the war, when he went to sea as an ordinary seaman. Out of his wartime experiences came *I'm a Stranger Here Myself*, a revealing study of the British sailor.

Since then, Anthony Thorne has gone from strength to strength, and among his post war novels have been the popular *Young Man on a Dolphin*, *So Long at The Fair*, which was made into a successful film starring Jean Simmons, and *The Baby and the Battleship*, recently filmed with John Mills.

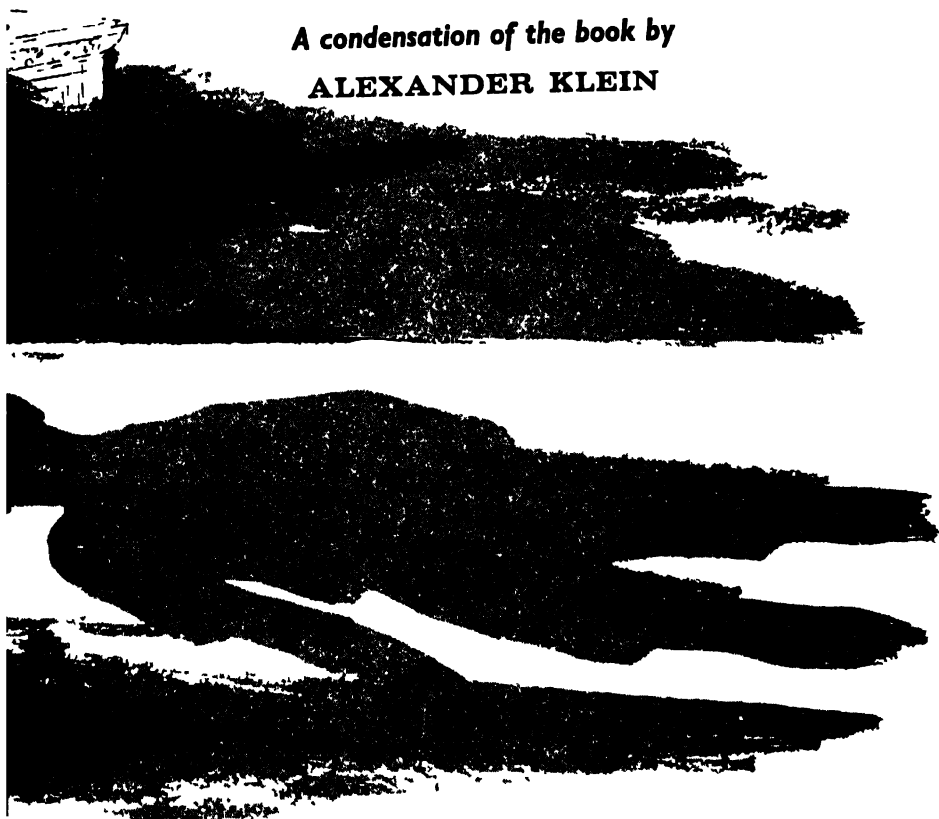
THE COUNTERFEIT TRAITOR



Illustrations by George Garland

THE COUNTERFEIT TRAITOR

A condensation of the book by
ALEXANDER KLEIN



"The Counterfeit Traitor" is published by Frederick Muller, London

ERIC ERICKSON has been called "the man who fooled Himmler." Actually, he was the man who fooled almost everyone. As this big, affable businessman made his profitable trips into wartime Germany, his close friends became his enemies, and even his own brother turned against him. Only a few people at the American Embassy in Stockholm knew the startling truth about his real mission.

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IT ALL BEGAN in December 1939 when Laurence Steinhardt, then the American Ambassador to Russia, flew to Stockholm on a confidential mission for President Roosevelt in connection with the Russian invasion of Finland. This mission failed, but during his brief stay in the Swedish capital, Steinhardt carried out another assignment, one of seemingly minor import. He invited an old acquaintance, Eric Siegfried Erickson, to dinner in his rooms at the Grand Hotel. Inevitably, Steinhardt and Erickson talked that evening about the European war which was by then well under way. German dive-bombers and Panzer Division tanks had already pulverized Poland. Now the Wehrmacht could be expected to turn its full attention westward, to France and England.

"Sooner or later, we Americans will be forced into it, too," Steinhardt said.

Although the Ambassador's tall, athletic-looking guest had been born in Brooklyn in 1889, the phrase "we Americans" did not, technically, include Erickson, who was now a Swedish citizen. "Are you going to be prepared this time, or will it be another last-minute affair?" he asked.

"We won't be as unprepared as in the past," Steinhardt said. "As a matter of fact, this is the very thing I want to talk to you about."

"Me?" Erickson asked in some astonishment.

"Yes, Eric. When the time comes, we shall badly need intelligence about the German oil industry. Would you be willing to help us get it?"

Ambassador Steinhardt believed that he knew Erickson well enough to predict his answer. Erickson had had a long and adventurous career

in the oil business. After leaving high school, he had worked in the Texas oil fields, then in a refinery in New Jersey where he rose to be assistant superintendent.

Having saved some money, he enrolled at the age of twenty-eight as a freshman at Cornell. There he was nicknamed "Red," after the Viking Eric the Red. When the First World War interrupted his formal education, he served briefly as an army officer. Back at Cornell after the war's end, he completed the qualification for his engineering degree. He also played half-back and catcher in the football and baseball teams. When he graduated, in 1921, he was in his thirties.

There followed some years in the Orient: first as a salesman for Standard Oil in China, later as representative of The Texas Company in Yokohama and Shanghai. Then The Texas Company transferred Erickson to Sweden, his ancestral country. Finally, in the late 1920's, he left the American firm and set up his own oil-importing company. As an importer, he had to journey far and wide: to Teheran, London, Berlin, Baghdad, Bucharest, Hong Kong and Tokyo. During the early 1930's, when Soviet Russia was employing foreign technicians and administrators, Erickson supervised the building of a refinery at Baku and terminals at Batum. He also gained a first-hand insight into the workings of a totalitarian system.

By this time it had become clear that Sweden would be Erickson's permanent base of operations. So he relinquished his formal allegiance to the United States and became a Swedish citizen. Thus when Laurence Steinhardt asked him if he would volunteer to work with American Intelligence, "Red" Erickson was under no obligation to accept the job. But Steinhardt had assessed his man correctly.

"Of course, I'd like to do what I can," he said.

"You may be able to do a lot more than you think," Steinhardt said thoughtfully. "You speak German fluently. And you've had many dealings with German oil firms." He paused briefly, but Erickson remained silent. "I'm asking you to redevelop your German contacts and get permission to travel to Germany on business. You may then be able to pick up information that will be helpful to the British—and eventually to the United States—in bombing the Nazi oil refineries."

"I see." Erickson sipped his after-dinner brandy slowly. "You know, this won't be easy. I'm hardly known as a Hitler-Heiler. I'd have to veer

gradually to a more favourable attitude towards the Nazis, with an eye to doing some profitable business with them."

"Precisely," Steinhardt said. "What we are asking you to do is going to make you highly unpopular with your friends. In fact, their antipathy will be important proof to the Germans of your authenticity. You'll be letting yourself in for a great deal of unpleasantness—and danger too. But——"

"I think I get the picture," Erickson interrupted decisively. "I'll do my best, Laurence."

"Excellent. I suggest you begin wooing the local Nazis immediately. In time, our Intelligence people here at the Embassy will contact you with specific instructions. Our people are co-operating with British Intelligence already; and any information that you obtain will be passed on to them. I'll give you one name now, but don't get in touch with him unless it's of urgent importance. Bradley. Major Richard Bradley."

"Major Richard Bradley," Erickson repeated.

"One other thing. Of course, we'll cover you for all expenses as well as some sort of—shall we call it an honorarium?"

"Let's skip the honorarium."

"As you like," Steinhardt said. He poured them a little more brandy and they drank to the success of Erickson's mission.

A WEEK later Erickson had already begun his slow, careful campaign. First, he stopped laughing when anyone told a new anti-Nazi joke. Then, bit by bit, he began to comment favourably on the Nazi régime and to predict continued successes for der Führer. He also started to cultivate certain German businessmen in Stockholm. In time, he made the acquaintance of the German Minister to Sweden and other officials at the German Legation.

For three months Erickson was completely on his own. Then, late in March 1940, he received a short note delivered by messenger:

The deal you discussed with Laurence seems to be going nicely. This is to assure you that we have been moving ahead at our end and are keeping track of all developments with keen interest. There will definitely be no problem about the necessary capital. Call me if there are any urgent developments. Best wishes.

RICHARD

Every few months thereafter Erickson would receive a cryptic message from Richard. Twice Richard telephoned him and, in guarded language, urged him to be patient. But such fleeting contacts failed to counteract Erickson's growing sense of futility.

By now the Nazis stood astride most of the continent of Europe, and President Roosevelt had called on the United States for all aid to Britain short of war. Hatred of America became an official Nazi dictum. And Erickson, as an American by birth, sensed that as far as the Germans in Stockholm were concerned he was still on trial.

At the same time his pro-Nazi attitudes were beginning to have disagreeable personal consequences. The Nazi occupation in Norway had intensified Swedish antipathy to the Nazis. From time to time, too, it was rumoured that the Nazis would invade Sweden to assure themselves access to Swedish iron ore. More and more, Erickson's collaboration appeared to be a despicable piece of opportunism.

Erickson's discomfort in his role became particularly acute when, early in 1941, the veteran bachelor fell in love with a Swedish girl, Ingrid Hedström. Just past thirty, she had honey coloured hair, deep hazel-grey eyes set in an oval face, and a breath-taking figure. Ingrid and her whole family were anti-Nazi, and Erickson was strongly tempted to tell them the truth. More than once he considered telephoning Major Bradley and tendering his resignation. But he had given Steinhardt his word. Reluctantly he continued the seemingly pointless masquerade, meanwhile avoiding, in so far as possible, discussing politics with his fiancée.

IT WAS NOT until the summer of 1941, more than a year and a half after his talk with Steinhardt, that Erickson finally received the telephone call for which he had waited so long.

"I'm calling about the Laurence deal," Richard's voice said in Swedish. "Could you meet us tomorrow at ten p.m.?" He mentioned an address in Grev Magnegatan.

"I'll be there," Erickson said.

At this time, the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.) had not yet been established and there was no official American civilian intelligence agency. The men Erickson met the following night were two American Embassy officials whose true identities will have to be shielded behind the fictitious names of Major Richard Bradley and Lieutenant-Commander

Thomas Mansfield. With an O.S.S. man who later came into the picture, they were to be his only contacts with American and British Intelligence.

They told him, at this first meeting, that the time had come for him to get permission to travel to Germany. "If your real purpose should be discovered while you're there, you'd probably be shot as a spy," Bradley said. "Think this thing over carefully. You can still call it off."

The time of final decision was upon Erickson, but he quickly realized that he had no real choice. A man was brought up in a certain way, he acquired certain values, and he could no more turn against those values than he could survive without food. "I told Steinhardt he could count on me and I meant it," he replied. "But I'm planning to get married. So I'd like to discuss the matter with my fiancée. I'm positive I can trust her."

Bradley sat thoughtfully for a moment. "We can hardly start this operation by questioning your judgment," he said. "So go ahead. We'll telephone you again soon. If your answer is still yes, we'll set a date and place for meeting. But the evening I name will be a day later than the one I really mean, and the hour named an hour later than the actual time."

For the first time, as he left the meeting that night, Erickson found himself glancing round to see whether anyone was following him. It was a sign that he had at last stepped into the operational phase of his career as a secret agent.

THE FOLLOWING EVENING Erickson took his fiancée out to dinner. Afterwards, in the silver-grey summer twilight, they strolled arm in arm through the Skansen open-air museum with its sixteenth- and seventeenth-century houses. They sat finally on a stone bench, and in that ancient landscape, all peace, comfort and solidarity, Erickson said what he had come to say.

Ingrid was stunned. At last she spoke. "Oh, Eric, it's wonderful to know that you feel about the Nazis as I do. But why *you*? Aren't there plenty of others who can do this work?"

"No, darling, not with my contacts and background in the oil business. Oil is the life-blood of the modern war machine. Perhaps we ought to postpone our marriage, Ingrid," he went on gently. "I'll be in constant danger and, as my wife, you would be in danger too. You'd have to pretend to be pro-Nazi. Even your family could not be told the truth."

"Even my family?"

"Yes. That's why I suggest that we postpone——"

"No," she said decisively. "I'd rather share the unpleasantness and the dangers with you. Besides, as a newly married man you're less likely to be suspected of espionage. And a wife and hostess can be useful in winning over Nazi officials. So——"

Then she was in his arms.

TWO EVENINGS later Erickson informed Major Bradley and Lieutenant-Commander Mansfield that he would be ready to proceed with his assignment, after he and his bride had returned to Stockholm from a brief honeymoon. The couple spent two bitter-sweet weeks at Erickson's farm near Krokek. When they came back to Stockholm, Erickson, now with his wife's help and at an accelerated tempo, resumed his campaign of wooing prominent Germans.

Within a few weeks, a German businessman sponsored him for membership of the German Chamber of Commerce in Stockholm. This step proclaimed Erickson's German sympathies to the entire Stockholm community at a time when Swedish sentiment for the Allies was being evidenced by a wry German joke that Erickson heard from Wilhelm Kortner of the German Legation.

"The moment it starts raining in London," Kortner said angrily, "Stockholmers put up their umbrellas."

Since Erickson's goal was to obtain permission to travel inside Germany, ostensibly as a Swedish oil importer arranging deals with German refineries, he tried to cultivate the appropriate officials: Kortner, who was Gestapo Chief Heinrich Himmler's top representative in Sweden, and Bruno Ulrich, commercial attaché of the German Legation. Kortner—tall, fair-haired and handsome, with only a hint of undue self-satisfaction—seemed favourably disposed towards Erickson. But Ulrich, a stocky, thick-lipped man, bluntly turned down Erickson's request to go to Germany on business: "I do not trust *any* Americans," he said. "And as far as I'm concerned, once an American, always an American."

"I've got to find some way to overcome his suspicions," Erickson told Ingrid, "or else get Kortner to overrule him."

An opportunity to impress both Ulrich and Kortner unexpectedly arose. Erickson was lunching with a German businessman when a

familiar voice greeted him, "Hello, Eric, how are you?" Erickson glanced up stonily at one of his oldest friends, Paul Wallenberg, a leading Swedish building contractor and a Jew. Erickson had cut off all contact with Wallenberg some time before, but Wallenberg, refusing to take offence, continued to greet him in friendly fashion whenever their paths crossed.

Aware that Kortner and Ulrich were seated at a near-by table, Erickson rose and in a loud voice said: "Wallenberg, I have warned you repeatedly to stop bothering me. I do not associate with Jews."

Wallenberg gave him a startled glance, then turned on his heel. The next day Erickson received a sealed note:

I cannot believe my friend has changed to this extent. Your outburst only strengthens my conviction that all this has some special purpose. If my guess is right, every good wish. If I can ever be of help, let me know. W.

As he burnt Paul Wallenberg's note in his study, where he now displayed a portrait of Adolf Hitler, Erickson felt nourished by the knowledge that one old friend would not be despising him but would secretly be cheering him.

ERICKSON's dressing-down of Wallenberg, however, failed to effect any change in Ulrich's attitude. And Erickson sensed that Kortner was not so completely won over that he would be willing to violate protocol and deliberately overrule his colleague.

"I'm up against a stone wall with Ulrich," Erickson told Bradley and Mansfield at their next meeting. "I think I've worked out a way of outflanking him, but it will involve my recruiting a colleague."

"Whom do you have in mind?" Mansfield asked, frowning.

"Prince Carl Bernadotte."

"The King's nephew!" Bradley exclaimed.

Erickson nodded. "Carl and I have been friends and business associates for years. I think he'd be willing to help. If not, I'm certain he can be trusted to keep quiet."

"How does the Prince fit into your plans?" asked Mansfield.

"Here's the angle. These Nazi big shots, like Kortner, are mostly from the middle class. They're generally fond of mingling with the upper social strata, especially royalty."

The Americans agreed that Erickson should at least arrange to meet Prince Carl.

Prince Carl was a tall, handsome young man, just turned thirty, a favourite of the Swedish people because of his adventurous spirit and complete lack of pomposity. Yet, when Erickson approached him, he was willing, unhesitatingly, to forfeit his popularity and incur the certain displeasure of the royal family as well, in order to share in work he felt would help shorten the war.

As soon as possible, Erickson mentioned to Kortner that Prince Carl was beginning to show genuine understanding of, and sympathy for, the Nazi cause. He suggested that they all lunch together.

"I should be most happy to meet the Prince," Kortner responded.

Indeed, Prince Carl Gustaf Oscar Fredrik Christian Bernadotte, the nephew of Sweden's King Gustav and the brother-in-law of Belgium's King Leopold, would be quite a catch for the Nazis.

Several days later, in the veranda café of Stockholm's Grand Hotel, Prince Carl made his public début in the company of Nazis. Heads turned and the veranda buzzed with comments. He and Kortner appeared to hit it off extremely well and it was not long before Kortner was a frequent week-end guest of the Prince, together with the Ericksons. Several times Bruno Ulrich, the distrustful attaché, also went along. But he seemed proof against all blandishments and Erickson still got nowhere with him.

Finally, following a particularly pleasant week-end party at Prince Carl's, at which Kortner was most friendly, Erickson went to Kortner's office and made a strong bid to be given permission to travel to Germany on business. "You know," he said in conclusion, "I think Ulrich takes a particular pleasure in exercising his power. I don't want to make trouble for you with a colleague who might have influential friends, but would it be possible to get in touch with some superior of his in Berlin who could back you up——"

"Berlin!" Kortner exclaimed. There was now contempt in his tone, as if Ulrich were a puppet who had been temporarily allowed to move on his own. "I do not need to get in touch with Berlin. *I* am the authority here. The ultimate decisions are mine. When do you want to go?"

"As soon as possible," Erickson said with a feeling of exultation.

"Consider it done."

Several days later Erickson was summoned to Ulrich's office to pick up his visa. The stocky attaché examined Erickson's dossier carefully, his lips curled slightly in a mockery of a smile. "Refused previously," he said. "This time all appears in order." He paused. "Technically, quite in order. As a representative of the Third Reich I ask you to forgive the inconvenience caused by the previous delays. Heil Hitler!"

Erickson took the proffered visa. "Heil Hitler," he said, returning the salute.

That evening he told Ingrid: "Ulrich is furious. But there's nothing he can do about it—for the moment."

ONE MORNING the following week—it was the latter part of September 1941—Ingrid drove Erickson to Bromma Airport. The air was clear, the sky sparkling blue.

Erickson had barely settled himself in his seat on the Lufthansa plane for Berlin when two men came aboard and spoke to the steward. "Which one is Eric Erickson?"

Erickson stood up. "I'm Erickson. What can I do for you?"



"You will have to come with us."

"Come with you?" Erickson cried. "Who the devil are you?"

"Police." The man flashed his identification. "We have some questions to ask you."

"But the plane is to leave in five minutes."

"The plane will be held for you," one of the detectives said.

"In case we let you get aboard again," the other added softly.

"What!" Erickson exploded indignantly. "What sort of idiocy is this?" Angrily he strode to the exit.

For once Erickson was not putting on an act. He was angry and apprehensive. Was all his hard work to be undone by Swedish secret police, who wouldn't even know what they were doing?

The men examined the contents of his bag and attaché-case painstakingly. Then they searched his clothes and person as if certain there was something to be found. Finally, disgusted, they gave up. "Sorry for the inconvenience," one of the detectives said.

"Go to hell," Erickson replied, almost cheerfully. As he hurried through the gate he caught a glimpse of Ingrid's puzzled anxious face. Then he was back in his seat, and the plane's engines were racing for the take-off. Erickson glanced about at the passengers. Were any of them from the Gestapo?

Then, free of the earth, Erickson suddenly realized that he himself was no longer free.

ERICKSON had landed at Berlin's Tempelhof Airport many times. Now there seemed to be many more trees than he remembered. And all the planes seemed to be under the trees. Camouflage! Soon he made out anti-aircraft guns, also under netting, heavily decorated with foliage.

The usual customs officials were augmented by a number of men in smart grey uniforms with black armbands on which the letters "S.D." were embroidered in silver. Ah, yes, this was Himmler's internal Gestapo—the Sicherheitsdienst, the security police—security agents working against men like himself.

Fifteen minutes after Erickson had passed the luggage and the visa

inspection, he was in the back of a black Opel—with two S.D. officers in front—headed for Gestapo Headquarters. He was startled to see the road flanked at various points by farm implements—old hayricks, rusted ploughs. They were neatly arranged, all pointing towards the sky: from the air they would look like anti-aircraft guns. . . . He had just picked up the first items of information for his report to American Intelligence.

In Berlin the car drew up in front of a massive grey building—8 Prinz Albrechstrasse, Gestapo Headquarters. After S.D. officers had checked his papers, he was escorted to the office of Baron Franz von Nordhoff, the S.S.-Obersturmbannführer beim S.D. who was to decide whether to approve his request to do business in the Reich. From Kortner, Erickson had learned that Von Nordhoff's word carried much weight with the Gestapo Chief, Himmler himself.

Baron von Nordhoff proved to be a tall, dapper, fair-haired man. His welcoming bow and gesture towards a leather chair were made with ease and graciousness. The blue-grey eyes he fastened on Erickson conveyed both shrewdness and perception. There were two other men in the office, sitting on a sofa directly under a huge portrait of Adolf Hitler. They seemed vaguely familiar.

"These officers tell me the Swedish police gave you quite a rough time at Bromma Airport," Baron von Nordhoff said. "Obviously at the instigation of British agents."

Now Erickson recalled the two men: fellow passengers on the plane from Stockholm—and Gestapo agents.

"They found nothing to detain me for, of course," Erickson said. "I intend to raise the devil about it when I get back."

Von Nordhoff smiled. "I've heard how you laced into them."

Evidently his anger and indignation had been reported and had made a favourable impression. Nevertheless, Baron von Nordhoff now launched into a cross-examination. Erickson's background and ancestry, his career in the oil industry were carefully probed.

Then, abruptly, Von Nordhoff said: "Why are you, an American, so eager to do business with us when—?" He thrust out a copy of *Der Angriff* with the heading: PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT WANTS GERMANY DESTROYED.

"This has nothing to do with me," Erickson said haughtily. "I'm a Swede, an Aryan, and"—he moderated his tone—"a businessman. I

value ability, achievement. What you Germans have accomplished—it's one of the most remarkable achievements in history. A few years' ago a defeated nation and now the rulers of Europe. Any practical man would be eager to do business with you!"

Von Nordhoff's expression remained non-committal. He continued firing questions at Eric: What did he think of Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf*? How would he feel about a Nazified Sweden? Would he travel in America on behalf of the German government?

Giving the "correct" answers to these and many other questions was not easy. Going overboard with pro-Nazi sentiments might have aroused Von Nordhoff's suspicions. Thus, to the question about travelling to America, Erickson's reply made it clear that he would not relish such a mission, and that he would probably be *persona non grata* in the United States.

Finally the interrogation was over. Erickson was given a room at the Hotel Eden and told to remain in Berlin until the Gestapo reached a decision in his case.

THAT EVENING Erickson decided to have dinner, for old times' sake, at the Café Unter den Linden. It was not quite what it used to be. Many of the chairs had cracks in their upholstery, with bits of stuffing popping through. The food was almost inedible. Most of the civilian clientele of the café looked sickly—flour-pale faces; lustreless, red-ringed eyes. By contrast, the few soldiers present seemed hale and hearty.

Back at the hotel he found that a rotund businessman from Essen had been installed as his room-mate. He had turned in early and was apparently sleeping soundly, but Erickson, recalling that Mansfield had warned him of the danger of giving himself away by talking in his sleep, swallowed two Benzedrine tablets, then got into bed to spend his first night in wartime Germany in wakeful, lonely vigil.

The next day he explored the main quarters of Berlin. Public buildings seemed dirty and neglected under their camouflage netting. Here and there he glimpsed evidences of British bombings: walls caved in, a street roped off. Huge anti-aircraft guns jutted up ominously from roof tops, and spacious areas, like Adolf Hitler Platz, had been filled in with ramshackle wooden frames so there would be no open squares as guide-marks for British bombers. The broad Ost-West Achse was covered with

wire netting that sported actual pine boughs; and lamp posts had been wrapped in green gauze, to merge the avenue into the Tiergarten beside it.

On a bench in the Tiergarten, Erickson saw one of "Himmler's finest," ominously resplendent in his black uniform and cap with its silver skull-and-crossbones insignia. Solicitously he was helping his wife feed a couple of squirrels. Near by an elderly couple, walking arm in arm, stopped suddenly and peered for an instant towards the officer on the bench. Then, protectively, the man steered the woman away. Erickson caught the flash of yellow on the man's left breast—the Star of David.

Erickson moved off rapidly. He had been in Berlin not quite a full day, but that day had the quality of a nightmare. Now he became conscious of the tension under which he was labouring. The blood pounded in his temples. He thought: this is what comes of hate, hate bottled up. Then he wondered: in time will I take all this as routine?

Early the following morning, after he had spent another sleepless night, this time partly owing to a British air raid, Erickson was summoned to Gestapo Headquarters.

Baron von Nordhoff was most cordial. "Herr Erickson, you may proceed with the necessary business contacts here in Berlin and in Hamburg. And in two other cities of your choice. All trade deals you arrange will, of course, clear through this office."

That same day Erickson began calling on various German officials and businessmen in Berlin. For several days he worked at promoting deals, much as he had in pre-war years—in executive offices, at luncheons, over cocktails. He also located several oil executives he had formerly known who might prove useful to him now.

In their last meeting, Bradley and Mansfield had warned him to be extremely careful in recruiting German confederates. For his first prospect he selected Baron Gerhard von Oldenbourg, a Junker who was serving as a sort of dollar-a-year man with the official Nazi Petrol Commission. Erickson recalled several occasions in pre-war years when Von Oldenbourg had confided his angry disapproval of the aims and methods of the Nazi régime.

However, the Junker's patriotism might revolt at the idea of helping the enemy at war with his Fatherland, might indeed lead him to turn

Erickson in to the Gestapo. There were risks, all right, but they were risks he had agreed to take.

During several meetings, Erickson tried to re-evaluate the character and temper of his friend. Von Oldenbourg appeared friendly but somewhat guarded, shying away from any political discussions. He displayed no signs of patriotic enthusiasm. One night, sipping after-dinner cognac in the German's study, Erickson decided the time had come for the plunge.

"Gerhard," he said, "I have something important to say to you—and to ask of you. Perhaps you've already guessed what it is. The fact is, I'm working for the other side, for the Allies."

"What!" Von Oldenbourg exclaimed, and Erickson felt fear welling up within him.

The phrase, "working for the other side," seemed to hang for a moment suspended in the air above them, clear and sharp and threatening. Thereupon Erickson said harshly something he had not planned but which now seemed to him urgent and inescapable:

"Yes, to put it bluntly, I'm a spy. A spy for the only people who can help Germany—the real Germany you love—regain her honour and standing among civilized nations. What I am about to request of you is ultimately in Germany's best interests.

"Very briefly it's this: Help me make business deals that will give me a legitimate reason for travelling in Germany. Also supply me with information, just information that comes to you as part of your daily work. America will eventually have to join the Allies. When they win the war—and it's sheer fantasy to imagine that the Nazis can defeat America, Britain and Russia—you and your wife and children will be appropriately rewarded. On the other hand, if the Nazis should just happen to win, you'll have lost nothing. They won't have a thing on you."

Baron von Oldenbourg sat for some moments immobilized. Was he harbouring the fantastic notion that Erickson might be an *agent provocateur* from the Gestapo and this proposal a trap? Or was he wrestling with his conscience? Or simply trying to work out the best move? Finally he stirred. First his arm—he took a sip of cognac. Then his head—he turned to stare straight into Erickson's eyes. "I had not the slightest inkling of what you were up to," he began. He reached for one

of his cigars, lit it, and took several deep puffs. "Before I can accept your proposition, Eric, I must get a clear picture of how things will work."

Erickson explained that his basic job was to report on the Nazi oil industry. General information on how well it was meeting the needs of the Wehrmacht would be useful in gauging the broad nature of the operations the German General Staff could logically undertake. But the most important information would be detailed data about specific oil refineries: how much they were producing, exact position and layout, near-by landmarks, type of camouflage, sites of anti-aircraft guns and protective fighter-plane fields. And, later, when refineries were being bombed, information on the results of the attacks, on how soon smashed equipment was replaced and production resumed.

He assured Von Oldenbourg that the risk to him would be negligible. "I see no reason why your name should be involved at all," he said. "Certainly not in writing. Except for my immediate contact in Stockholm no one need know it. All you need do is to tell me what you learn in the course of your normal official duties. I don't ask you to do anything that would mean added risk."

"I see."

It suddenly occurred to Erickson that he was making the whole thing sound so safe and easy that Von Oldenbourg might begin to feel his role ignominious. "Of course, Gerhard," he added, "there is always *some* element of risk. What I'm proposing requires the larger view. It's always a lot safer, I suppose, to do nothing, but it's hardly the best thing for your future—and for your country."

Erickson's salesman's intuition told him that it was time to close the sale by the method known as "closing on a minor point"—a technique used often by car salesmen, who get the customer finally to say yes by making him decide whether he wants the blue or the green saloon, the twelve- or the twenty-four-month payment plan. With no hint of pressure in his tone, Erickson said:

"Gerhard, tell me what sorts of legitimate deals do you think you can help me make? What types of oil could I buy most expeditiously to get me started? I was thinking of . . ."

The technique was working! Von Oldenbourg broke in to make a specific suggestion: "I'd say machine-lubricating oil." And he went on to provide details.

Erickson had closed his sale; he had recruited his first German confederate.

It was nearly two in the morning when Erickson finally rose to go. But Von Oldenbourg motioned him to wait a moment.

"There is just one more thing, Eric. This is a dangerous business you are engaged in. We must face the possibility that one day you will——" Von Oldenbourg flicked his cigar in an unmistakable gesture across his throat. "If you were to die, Eric, I'd have no proof that I had helped the Allies. There's been talk of invading Sweden and then even your superior might be kaput. What I need is a certificate from you, which, of course, I'll keep carefully hidden."

Erickson thought swiftly. If such a document were ever found by the Gestapo it would be his own death warrant. "Wouldn't it be safer if I arranged to have this certificate placed in a safe-deposit box somewhere in England or America?" he asked.

"No," Von Oldenbourg said decisively. "I will hide it where it will be perfectly safe. I tell you, Eric, I must have this document in my own possession."

Well, I'll have to risk it, Erickson thought. On a sheet of paper supplied by Von Oldenbourg, he now wrote:

This is to certify that Baron Gerhard von Oldenbourg of Berlin is supplying me with vital information. Through the authority vested in me by my superiors at the American Embassy in Stockholm I have promised Baron von Oldenbourg that the Allies will show their generous appreciation of his work after they win the war. In the event of my death this certificate will bear witness to Von Oldenbourg's efforts on our behalf.

ERIC S. ERICKSON

During the following week Erickson recruited a number of other collaborators, including Anton Reissner, a minor oil executive. Some of the men and women who agreed to work with him he judged to be genuinely anti-Nazi. Others he gauged as opportunists, assuring themselves, at little risk, of being on the winning side of the war no matter who the victor was. Two of the new recruits asked him for letters such as he had written for Von Oldenbourg.

Ever since the night he had begun his mission, Erickson had been on the alert to discover whether he was being followed by the Gestapo. He

would stop to gaze at a shop window so that he could glimpse the reflection of the street behind him. He became apparently absent-minded, frequently passing by his destination so that he would have to retrace his steps. As far as he could tell, he was not being followed. But he could not be sure the Gestapo was not playing a cat-and-mouse game with him in the hope of bagging additional Allied agents. Fearing hidden microphones, he tied a handkerchief over his mouth at night in case he talked in his sleep.

Meanwhile his confederates had begun to supply him with data about the general status of the Nazi oil industry and details about specific installations. He carefully memorized each bit of information. One central fact was already emerging clearly: the Nazis were going to rely heavily on their supply of synthetic oil. And if the Allies succeeded in wrecking the natural oil fields—chiefly round Ploesti, in Roumania—the Nazis would be almost *wholly* dependent on their synthetic industry for both aviation and automotive fuel. Erickson began to harbour high hopes for his mission.

AFTER TWO weeks in Berlin, Erickson set off for Hamburg. He found it less altered by the war than Berlin. A city of waterways and bridges, like Stockholm and Venice, it retained much of its pre-war charm.

Hamburg was Germany's biggest port. Moreover, the city and its suburbs contained numerous oil and chemical plants, important strategic bombing targets. Erickson visited as many refineries as he could without arousing suspicion, entertained officials and made mental notes of everything that might prove of value.

He also continued to build up his spy network. One of the men he recruited was Otto Holtz, whom he had not seen for some years. Of medium height, spare and trim, Holtz had always seemed a man of rigorous conscience, with a penchant for independent thought. Moreover, Erickson remembered, Holtz had once had some close Jewish friends. And, before the Nazis were in power, he had, in Erickson's presence, made disparaging remarks about Hitler.

One day, over a late lunch, at a strategically isolated table, Erickson put the matter directly to Holtz.

"I have no hesitation in telling you here and now that I'm with you," Holtz replied. "But there's one thing we must discuss. I don't believe

you know my second wife, Klara. I think when you see her you will understand why I fell in love with her. Klara, however, does not know anything of my political views. I am sorry to say it, but she is a confirmed Nazi. And she's turned our little Hans into a Nazi too. If she were to find out what I'm doing with you, I believe she would consider it her duty to turn us both in."

"We have nothing to fear," Erickson assured Holtz. "Our business will, on the face of it, be perfectly legitimate."

The next evening, Erickson dined with Otto and Klara Holtz. Their house was large and Klara had stuffed it full of expensive, rococo furniture. Klara herself exhibited similar qualities. Much younger than Holtz, she had a pale, clear skin, glossy black curls, a pretty but somewhat hard face, and a voluptuous way of moving. She was obviously expensive and prized herself accordingly. Erickson made a mental note to bring her a *Gåvopaket* on his next visit—things like butter and a ham, but also some perfume, a pair of stockings. "Herr Erickson," Klara was saying, "it's not often nowadays that we entertain your countrymen at our house. But this will change soon. The Fuhrer will bring us a quick victory."

Erickson raised his glass. "Let's drink to that," he said. "To a short war and a quick victory—and the merry days to follow."

Shortly before dinner young Hans joined them. Short for his age, though husky, Hans wore glasses. Not quite nine, he was completely the product of the new Germany. To say "Heil Hitler" for hello came naturally to him; and Erickson almost fancied that the boy regarded him with a certain wariness. What chilled Erickson, however, was the tone of deadly certitude in which Hans made his remarks. Within ten minutes he had informed Erickson that early German adventurers had first discovered America, and that there was a boy in his class whom he suspected of not being a true German patriot. "I think, soon, I must report him and his parents to the authorities," he said.

"You will do nothing of the sort," Herr Holtz commanded.

"Otto," Klara said, "we must not discourage the boy's zeal."

The dinner she served a little later was the best Erickson had eaten since leaving Stockholm, but he was immensely relieved when she finally excused herself and went off to supervise Hans's bedtime. "If you will forgive me, Herr Erickson, I'm going to retire early myself. Do come and see us again." She flashed him a coquettish smile.

"They cannot hear us now," Herr Holtz said when she had gone, "so we can speak quite freely."

"Perhaps," Erickson replied guardedly. "Still, I think we should avoid saying anything specific. I can see exactly what you mean about your wife and boy."

Herr Holtz sighed. "Essentially, Hans is no longer my boy. He belongs to the Führer."

As they talked, Erickson realized that he was serving as a kind of safety-valve for Holtz. Inner thoughts and attitudes the German had had to hide were now being expressed, perhaps for the first time for years, as he complained about the Nazi régime. Finally Holtz asked: "Has anyone told you the joke about the aeroplane?"

"No."

"Well, it's a riddle. There's an aeroplane flying with four people in it. Göring is piloting it and Hitler, Himmler and Goebbels are the passengers. The engines fail and the plane crashes, killing the three passengers and the pilot. The question is, who's saved?"

"Who's saved?" repeated Erickson. "I give up."

"The German people."

Erickson laughed wryly. "That's too good to be just a joke," he said. "We'll do what we can to make it come true, eh?"

"Ja, ja, we'll do our best," Holtz said.

The next day Holtz asked for a letter from Erickson that testified to Holtz's work on behalf of the Allies. This time Erickson made out the death warrant for two as if it were a routine receipt.

FROM Hamburg Erickson went to Halle and Hanover, where he initiated several legitimate oil deals and picked up a fair bit of information. Each night he wrote down the facts he had obtained, even making crude maps to mark refineries, airstrips and ack-ack positions. After memorizing this mass of information, he would burn the sheets of paper and flush the ashes down the toilet.

Back in Berlin, Erickson was faced with the all-important matter of clearing through the Gestapo and arranging his flight home. Obersturmbannführer von Nordhoff listened courteously as he summarized his activities. Then the official asked a few questions about some of the contracts. And that, apparently, was all.

After leaving Gestapo headquarters, Erickson made farewell phone calls to various executives—including Von Oldenbourg, Reissner, and others with whom he had made private arrangements. His clearance and plane reservation for the following morning were soon confirmed. Tomorrow afternoon he would be in Stockholm—unless the Gestapo *had* been tipped off.

The next morning at eleven he arrived at Tempelhof Aerodrome. The parallel lines before the boarding gates moved forward at a snail's pace. Glancing about at the people in the waiting-room, he wondered if there was another there like himself, a deceiver among the deceived. Finally he reached the desk. The S.D. men stood waiting. His papers and reservation were checked. His bag and attaché-case were opened and inspected. This was it—the last test for this trip. "Thank you, Herr Erickson," the grey-uniformed officer was saying, returning his papers. And then, at last, he was in his seat, aft of the wings and next to the window.

Minutes later, Germany was melting away beneath him, vanishing in the cloud mist like a dream.

WHEN THE lights of Stockholm fused into a huge, welcoming flare in the grey dusk, Erickson was thoroughly unprepared for what happened: tears came into his eyes. Good Lord, he told himself angrily, I mustn't lose my grip like this every time I make a trip to Germany. And then for the first time he realized fully just how difficult all this must be for Ingrid.

She was there, waiting for him at the airport. The moment he had cleared customs, they drove off in their car and were alone, with nothing to mar the delightful feeling of freedom.

"I've dismissed the maid," Ingrid said. "From now on, there will be just the two of us in the house, so we can talk freely."

Over a delicious supper he told her everything—except the names of his newly recruited German confederates. When he had finished, she came over and put her arms round his neck, and kissed him. "Tonight, Eric, you can say anything at all in your sleep."

THE NEXT day Erickson accompanied Prince Carl to the office they were using for their joint business enterprises, and dictated a report covering the commercial transactions he had made in Germany. He also wrote letters to various German oil companies. And that night after dinner, watching carefully to see that he was not being followed, Erickson went to meet the American Intelligence men at a prearranged rendezvous.

Bradley and Mansfield were both there to welcome him. Erickson gave them a quick thumb-nail sketch of what he had accomplished.

"We couldn't have hoped for anything better," Bradley said.

Erickson laughed a little nervously. "I forgot to mention how I almost got slaughtered before I even got started."

"The Swedish detectives at Bromma?" Mansfield said.

"Don't tell me——" Erickson began, suddenly seeing light.

Mansfield nodded. "We put them up to it, warned them solemnly that we suspected you of illegal pro-German activities. We thought that if there were any Gestapo operatives aboard the plane the incident would go down in the book as a good mark for you."

"You thought right," Erickson said. "But why in heaven's name didn't you let me in on it? I nearly had heart failure."

"We wanted you to react naturally, with spontaneous indignation and anger—the way you apparently did," Bradley explained. "Now then," he went on, "pour it all into this Dictaphone tube. Give us every detail."

The data rolled out, slick and smooth. Erickson also drew simple maps showing the positions of refineries, airstrips and anti-aircraft batteries. It was nearly one in the morning before he had finished.

"I guess that does it for now," Mansfield said. He went into the kitchen and returned with three glasses of Scotch and soda. "Double for you, Eric."

"Splendid. I'm wrung dry!"

Mansfield hesitated. Then he went on, "Eric, I'm sure you realize that British bomber forces are limited and have to strike at targets in order of priority."

"Naturally."

"Well, we're going to rush this data to them—via our contact at the British Embassy. But it may be a long, long time before there's any action taken against oil targets."

"I understand," Erickson said.

By the time he left the apartment it was nearly two. Walking home in the dark he felt curiously light-headed, as if the data he had kept stored in his head had possessed physical mass.

MANSFIELD had been right: Erickson's trip into Nazi Germany seemed to have no effect on the conduct of the war in the autumn and winter of 1941-42. Meanwhile, in Stockholm, he and Ingrid and Prince Carl continued to play their pro-Nazi roles.

Soon the German shipments of oil Erickson had arranged for began to arrive in Sweden. In return, the Nazis received credits with which they then paid for iron ore and other essentials they were importing from Sweden. But Erickson and Prince Carl had the satisfaction of knowing that, via a series of carefully screened transactions, the high-grade oil they received was being used by fast British motor-boats which, loaded with vital Swedish ball-bearings and machine parts, ran the German blockade regularly.

Soon after the first shipment arrived, Erickson and Prince Carl were placed on the Allied black list for aiding the Nazi war effort. For all who favoured the Allied cause, this officially labelled them "Pariah."

"I know I'm not guilty of what they condemn me for, yet I *feel* guilty," Erickson told Ingrid. "Maybe it's because I'm deceiving them, making fools of people I really like."

"I know," Ingrid said. "I feel it especially with my mother and father—not because *I'm* hurt but because I know I'm hurting *them*."

THEN CAME Pearl Harbour. Erickson—although a Swedish citizen now—still tended to think of himself also as an American. His parents were no longer living, but his brother in America, learning about his pro-Nazi activities from mutual Swedish acquaintances, now wrote urging him to stop trafficking with the Nazis. Erickson, following the instructions of American Intelligence, replied firmly, saying that he knew what he was doing and suggested that his brother advise his friends' sons to stay out of the army because the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe were going to keep on making mincemeat out of the Allies. Whereupon the brother wrote him a sharp note, permanently severing all connections with him.

As Erickson read this note he had the eerie feeling that he, Ingrid and

Prince Carl were alone in a hostile world. Only one friend still remained in it: Paul Wallenberg, who had intuitively grasped the truth.

EARLY IN January 1942, Erickson made another trip to Germany. He wanted to find out whether the Nazis would permit him to travel inside the Reich now that his country of origin, America, had entered the war. Also, it was important to continue cultivating his newly established contacts.

The second trip lasted only a tense five days, but during the early months of 1942 Erickson continued to make frequent trips to Germany. From his confederates he was now receiving a steady flow of specific information about oil installations. His area of travel within the Reich broadened considerably, and he was also able to visit the Ploesti plants in Roumania, Germany's major source of natural oil and hence a prime strategic target. According to the official history, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, "Within a month after Pearl Harbour, the Americans were studying the feasibility of bombing Ploesti." It was just seven weeks after Pearl Harbour that Erickson was at Ploesti obtaining first-hand data on the installations.

A number of times Prince Carl accompanied Erickson to Berlin. With his help Erickson was able to cultivate closer relations with key Gestapo officials and oil executives with whom he could make little headway on his own. The Nazis particularly appreciated the fact that Prince Carl, a member of the Swedish royal family, was visiting Germany as a friend of the Reich. However, on the Prince's second trip with Erickson he was arrested in Berlin. He had been visiting two German friends who tuned in on a forbidden B.B.C. broadcast. A neighbour overheard them and reported it. Within a few minutes they had been apprehended, and taken to Moabit Prison.

As soon as he was informed of Prince Carl's detention Erickson telephoned a relative of Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring—a friend of Prince Carl's in years past—who, in turn, managed to reach Göring himself. Göring was sensitive to the unfavourable political complications that would ensue should the arrest of a member of the Swedish royal family become known. He arranged for Prince Carl's immediate release and included the Prince's German friends in the release order. Still, the incident had given both Prince Carl and Erickson a scare.

Just how thorough the Nazis were in their investigative methods Erickson learned a few weeks later on another trip, when he was summoned to Baron von Nordhoff's office. Without preliminaries, Von Nordhoff began firing a series of questions at him about his past history. What had he been doing and where had he been in 1916? 1918? 1921? What were the ages, full names and dates of birth of his father and mother? His brother? Then the Baron subjected Erickson to a detailed cross-examination of his career and business



activities, seemingly with an emphasis on his earlier years. As Erickson replied, Von Nordhoff kept making notes on a dossier sheet. Finally he laughed and said: "Herr Erickson, you tell the truth—though your memory is sometimes faulty." And the German told his visitor where his memory had erred—by a month in one case, by three months in another, and by an accidental reversal of his job record at one point.

Erickson was astonished at the detailed data on his activities that the Gestapo had compiled. It was their subtle but effective way of saying: "See how efficient we are? If you're ever tempted to double-cross us, remember, we'll track you down just as efficiently."

Only after the war ended did the O.S.S. learn that months before Pearl Harbor a German agent in America had contacted the Cornell University Alumni Association and obtained Erickson's biography, including his record since he had graduated. It was as easy as that. But it was typical of German "*Gründlichkeit*," of the painstaking thoroughness against which Erickson was pitted.

JUNE 12, 1942, was a red-letter day for Erickson—and for Ingrid and Prince Carl. On that day, from an Egyptian air base, a dozen American Army Air Force B-24s struck at the Ploesti refineries in Roumania, which Erickson had reported on some months previously. Very little damage was inflicted. Nevertheless, for Erickson the Ploesti raid was a heartening portent of things to come. For almost all the next year, he continued his trips to Germany every few weeks, patiently collecting facts about as many refineries as possible and promptly relaying his information to Major Bradley and Lieutenant-Commander Mansfield and to an O.S.S. liaison officer—I shall call him Philip Bowman—who now became his direct superior.

During most of 1942 the course of battle had seemed to favour the Axis. But in November 1942 the Russians launched a vigorous counter-attack against the invading Nazi legions, and American might had begun to make itself felt. Shortly after Montgomery's great victory at El Alamein, a large American force landed in North Africa, and the pincers movement that was to spell the end of Rommel's Afrika Korps had begun.

Meanwhile the R.A.F. raids on German cities had also increased. For Erickson this meant spending many hours in air-raid shelters. Through his personal observations he became convinced that, while probably necessary as a sign of retaliatory Allied might, these over-all bombings of cities were actually strengthening the morale of the German people. Then in January 1943, at the Casablanca Conference, Churchill and Roosevelt announced their formula of "unconditional surrender," and Erickson saw at first hand how effectively Goebbel's propaganda machine exploited the Casablanca announcement to further stiffen German resistance.

The unconditional-surrender announcement was, however, a symbol of Allied confidence. Soon the tide began to turn definitely in favour of the Allies, but Erickson could not yet really feel that his own work was contributing to it. And with each trip into Germany he could not but wonder how long his luck would hold out. There were constant reminders of danger—black-uniformed Gestapo men striding purposefully out of doors as he was passing by (involuntarily his heartbeat would quicken); newspaper stories, almost daily, of the arrest and execution of spies.

It was not until the summer of 1943 that he began to reap the harvest he had been sowing for nearly two years. In a series of raids bombers of the United States Eighth Air Force wreaked serious damage on oil refineries at Hamburg, Hanover, Marienburg and Ludwigshafen. The summer also brought another long-range raid on Ploesti by one hundred and seventy-seven Mediterranean-based American heavy bombers. This raid is rated one of the outstanding strategic air operations of the war. Based on post-war examination of enemy records, it is estimated that more than forty per cent of the total refining capacity of Ploesti was destroyed.

As Erickson read about these raids in the Swedish press, the long-anticipated sense of accomplishment, of triumph, did not come up to expectations. And it was quickly followed by a queasy sensation in his stomach. For the first time in all these months he was feeling his role.

He had liked some of the oil executives he had been dealing with; most of the Gestapo officials—Von Nordhoff, for example—had been pleasant and courteous. They had all been friendly to him and he had duped and betrayed them.

Erickson complained to Prince Carl: "This is one price I never expected to pay—to feel guilty about what I'm doing. I wonder how Von Oldenbourg and Holtz and the others feel at the moment?"

But eventually he became hardened to the situation. And for the rest of 1943 and into 1944 he was able to supply Allied Intelligence with valuable reports of what the raids were accomplishing, and how the Germans were speeding repairs and activating idle refineries. During this period he was exposed to a new sort of danger.

On an evening visit to a Hanover refinery, he was suddenly frozen into immobility by the screaming wail of the air-raid sirens.

"*Verfluchte Amerikaner*," the manager cursed as he led the way to the plant's underground shelter.

For some minutes they could hear clearly the successive cycles of explosions which repeatedly rose in crescendos. The manager's lips were pressed together in pain as he winced with each explosion.

Half an hour later the signed oil-importing agreement in Erickson's pocket was not worth the paper it was written on; Allied T.N.T. guided by Erickson's previously supplied information, had smashed much of the plant to bits while he was in it.

"*Verdammt Schweine*," cursed the manager.

"Ja," echoed Erickson, and for once he partly meant what he said. But at any rate, he told himself, being personally endangered by this Allied raid ought to help keep suspicion away from him.

ERICKSON's active duty as a spy was not devoid of pleasant episodes. For one thing, there were his frequent meetings with Holtz, Reissner and his other confederates. He came to like these men very much. And with them he could take off his mask and be himself.

Then, too, his role had its exhilarating side. To walk boldly into Gestapo Headquarters; to know that in various parts of the Reich his twelve aides were, so to speak, laying time bombs—all this was to experience the sweet, surging pulse of power.

He had not, however, the usual relaxation of feminine companionship after the cares of the day. In the past, Erickson had led what many would consider a gay, adventurous existence. With so many men away at the front, there would have been no dearth of attractive partners to share his leisure hours in Germany. But married now, and in love with his wife, he had little interest in such diversions.

Women, however, continued to find the bluff, burly Erickson attractive. As time went on, he was surprised at the increasing number of advances made towards him by wives of friendly Nazi officials. It could hardly be that his charm had suddenly become irresistible. The determining factor, Erickson realized, must be the changing tide of fortune at the front. A neutral Swedish businessman was probably beginning to have certain added attractions in the way of future security. He had to side-step these advances with delicacy.

Of the various German women Erickson met during his years as an Allied agent, one did come to hold a special place in his affections, and his involvement with her led to serious complications and dangers. She was Marianne von Mollendorf.

His first meeting with her was arranged by Allied Intelligence in the summer of 1942. Shortly before one of his trips to Germany, he was shown a photograph of Marianne, an attractive brunette, and told that she would telephone him in Berlin at the Hotel Eden. They would identify themselves by a prearranged code and she would designate the time and place of their rendezvous.

"Marianne belongs to a prominent German family," Bowman said. "She once lived for several years in England and France. She's a strong German patriot, with monarchist leanings, and hates the whole Nazi movement. She's been working for us for some time.

"The point is," he went on, "that Marianne is often invited to private parties and official functions attended by Nazi big shots. Guided by your knowledge of the oil industry, she may be able to pick up very valuable information and tip you off to officials who can be helpful to you. Also, she can suggest oil executives whom she knows to be anti-Nazi. You could then arrange to meet them and sound them out about working with you. Since your travels are officially restricted, there are still some refineries we have no information about; but naturally you'll be the final judge of whether to risk recruiting any German Marianne recommends. Unless you decide to do so, try not to use her name. One more thing: Marianne will pass on to you certain information she's obtained for us. We might as well eliminate her other courier contact for the time being."

"Of course," Erickson replied.

He then carefully memorized the somewhat complicated password phrases Marianne and he were to exchange.

The following day, Erickson flew to Berlin. That evening the telephone rang in his room at the Hotel Eden.

"Hello, darling Eric," a low, rich female voice said. "I'm so happy you are in Berlin again, my conquering eagle."

The woman's pleasing voice was completely strange to Erickson, but the words she spoke were precisely those Bowman had recited for him. So Erickson replied as prearranged:

"How wonderful to hear your voice again, my beautiful dove."

"I can't talk too long, Eric. Could we meet on Wednesday evening at ten? At the usual place?"

"Yes. Wednesday evening. The world will stand still until then, my darling."

"The usual place," Erickson had been instructed, would be a certain corner in a residential section of Berlin. He arrived shortly before ten, and waited for what seemed a long time on that corner; but the phosphorescent hands of his watch told him it was barely five minutes. Then, behind him, he heard the click-clack of a woman's high heels. "Is that you, my conquering eagle?" a woman's voice whispered in the dark.

"Yes, my beautiful dove," Erickson replied.

To anyone observing them from a distance it would appear that they were in a passionate embrace.

"The sun shines bright for me now," she whispered.

"All clouds disperse when I am in your arms," Erickson whispered back.

The password ritual completed, Marianne said, "Come along; everything is arranged. The house is in the next block."

Arm in arm, they walked in silence for some minutes. Finally Erickson said, "I hope this does not embarrass you too much."

"*Nein, nein*, of course not."

As they let themselves into the blacked-out house, Erickson saw that at one time it must have been a fashionable private residence; now it was divided into furnished rooms and apartments.

Marianne closed and bolted the door of her first-floor room. By a finger over her lips she warned him not to speak freely yet.

The room was furnished in nondescript style: a high-backed, tapestried chair; a shabby sofa; a chest of drawers; a double bed behind a screen in one corner; two or three lamps with tasselled shades; a flowered rug; and, of course, black-out curtains. Marianne turned on the ancient radio, to minimize the danger of their being overheard from the hall, and inspected every nook and cranny where a microphone might be hidden. Erickson had an impression of energy and vivacity as her attractive, supple figure moved quickly about the room.

"You're very efficient," he said.

"One must be."

She sat on the high-backed chair, he on the sofa. Her animated features conveyed strength and charm. She had wavy, light-brown hair, a high forehead and dark, intelligent eyes. He decided she would make an excellent colleague.

THIS FIRST meeting lasted about two hours. Besides covering the matters Bowman had mentioned, they arranged the pattern of future meetings. These would always be initiated by Marianne, who would periodically call the two or three hotels in Berlin where Erickson stayed. The ostensible purpose of the meetings would continue to be romance. In case they should ever be arrested and questioned separately, they

concocted a plot for their intrigue—where they had met and how he had quickly wooed and won her.

“You should know one more thing,” she said. “I have an operation scar here”—she pointed to her right side—“my appendix. And a wine-coloured birthmark here.” She tapped her left hip.

Erickson laughed with admiration. “You think of everything, don’t you?” Her manner and tone had been frank and at the same time modest.

They left separately, Erickson going first.

Later during this same trip they met again, in the same room. Their discussion of the information Marianne had picked up was quite brief, but they spent an hour or more getting better acquainted.

In the unusual circumstances of simulated intimacy and shared danger, Erickson found himself oddly reserved and detected a similar restraint in Marianne. She left first this time. The moment she closed the door, he felt a loneliness so acute it was almost physically painful.

For many months thereafter, Erickson met Marianne secretly on nearly every one of his trips to Germany. Once they glimpsed each other at a large party to which Marianne had come in the company of a tall, distinguished-looking Luftwaffe general. Afterwards, for some reason, neither of them ever referred to the episode.

Gradually, the rooms where they met began to assume a special reality of their own. Perhaps under these special circumstances—not unlike those of two people shipwrecked on a desert island—their feeling for each other was bound to deepen.

The day came when the ostensible purpose of their meeting was no longer pure camouflage. Now they behaved as lovers, but with the tacit understanding that their relationship existed, just as did their espionage connection, only in the island universe which they inhabited exclusively.

IN THE early months of 1944 Erickson’s dangerous, complex assignment was beginning to take a heavy toll. The first week of March found him irritated and depressed. He felt himself a tiny cog in a huge, complicated network—an ineffectual cog.



"When, if ever, will the Allied bombers really start to smash at the refineries?" he asked himself.

That very week the same question was being hotly debated at General Eisenhower's headquarters, where Allied commanders were planning the air strategy that was to help make possible the invasion of France. Eisenhower's decision was a difficult one. He received strong recommendations—particularly from the British—to endorse, instead of an oil-bombing campaign, an all-out attack on the railway system of Western Europe which was so important for moving Nazi troops and equipment.

But now, on March 5, 1944, General Carl A. Spaatz, Chief of the United States Strategic Air Force, presented a strong series of arguments for an oil offensive. Erickson would have been highly gratified had he heard Spaatz's case, which ran as follows: The only way to weaken the Luftwaffe and gain the air supremacy the Allies would have to achieve before the invasion was to draw German fighter planes into the skies where they could be shot down. In all likelihood, the German Air Force would not risk their fighter planes in order to defend railway centres. But if the Allies bombed vital oil installations, threatening to cut the lifeline of the German war machine, the Luftwaffe would be forced to come out and fight. *And, through intelligence, the Allies now knew the exact position and relative importance of the major oil refineries.*

Spaatz also pointed out to Eisenhower that the Germans, could, if left unmolested for the next six months, produce some 8,500,000 tons of oil, relieving them of any shortages for the battles after the invasion. Whereas a series of crushing blows at the refineries now would seriously decrease the mobility of the German Army.

Eisenhower's decision came on March 25. He assigned priority to the railway-bombing campaign, in part, probably, for the sake of Allied unity, since the British commanders were solidly opposed to the oil campaign at that time.

Knowing how much was at stake, General Arnold, Chief of the United States Air Force, and General Spaatz put their heads together. Since Eisenhower's directive called for bombing attacks on rail-transportation centres, why couldn't they order a raid on Ploesti's railway marshalling yards, which were being utilized to transport German troops to the Russian front? And if the Allied bombs fell mostly on oil-refineries,

rather than on the railway yards, well, those "chance" hits might help prove the value of oil raids. *

That first "back-door" raid on Ploesti took place on April 5, 1944. As planned, most of the bombs "missed" the railway yards but struck the Astra group of refineries near by. Jubilant, Generals Spaatz and Arnold ordered three further attacks on "the Ploesti transportation targets." And Erickson, learning from German oil executives that these attacks were beginning to have serious consequences, took heart.

Meanwhile, on April 17, Eisenhower had issued a new directive to the Strategic Air Force. The German Air Force was made official number-one target. Spaatz immediately suggested that Eisenhower could now approve oil raids as part and parcel of the top-priority campaign. For wouldn't attacks on the synthetic-oil plants which produced aviation fuel be an attempt to weaken the German Air Force? Furthermore, Spaatz confidently predicted again, the oil raids would flush the Nazi fighters into the air.

To this line of argument Eisenhower proved receptive. On April 19 he granted Spaatz verbal permission to have General Doolittle mass a large group of Eighth Air Force heavies, for attacks on as many Nazi synthetic-oil refineries as possible.

THE GREAT experimental assault was staged on May 12. Spaatz's predictions proved sound indeed. The Luftwaffe came out and fought. To quote the official history, *Army Air Forces in World War II*:

Near Frankfurt between 150 and 200 enemy aircraft attacked in mass

More than 800 (Allied) heavies attacked dropping 1,718 tons on the synthetic oil plants at Merseburg-Leuna, Brux, Lutzkendorf, Bohlen, Zeitz and other cities. . . .

(Allied) bomber crews claimed 115 enemy aircraft and fighter pilots (claimed) 75. Certainly the professed objective of the mission was attained: the German Air Force reacted vigorously to the attacks on oil plants and suffered severe losses.

The excellent results of this raid clinched Spaatz's case, and the British were won over to the oil campaign by the end of May. Now, at long last, the data Erickson had dictated into scores of shiny Dictaphone cylinders were actually leading to meaningful results.

In the next three and a half weeks, Allied bombers struck repeatedly at Ploesti and at many key synthetic-oil refineries. As Erickson found out on his subsequent trips inside Germany, the results of these attacks were unbelievable. At the mammoth Merseburg-Leuna plant, for example, German workers were so demoralized that both Propaganda Chief Goebbels and Albert Speer, head of German war production, rushed there to make inspirational speeches and to speed up the reconstruction of the shattered installations.

After the war an Allied survey showed that German oil production was cut in half, and more than 120,000 men had to be assigned the crucial job of rebuilding the plants in a desperate attempt to maintain the flow of fuel to the Nazi armed forces.

Actually the Wehrmacht did not feel the painful effects of the oil shortage until later that summer, when German tanks and motor vehicles were abandoned all over France for lack of oil. But on D-Day it was largely because of the oil bombings that the Luftwaffe had so few squadrons on hand to send up against the invaders. As General Spaatz had expected, the attacks on the refineries had forced the German Air Force to come out and fight, and in May Allied airmen had shot down nearly 2,500 German fighter planes. Moreover, strong fighter squadrons that Göring had planned to send to France before the invasion had to be retained in Germany for the defence of the refineries. Others were recalled.

Two days after D-Day—on June 8—General Spaatz was given permission to proclaim publicly that “the primary aim of the United States Strategic Air Force is now to deny oil to enemy armed forces.”

No one read this statement with more interest than Eric Erickson and Prince Carl Bernadotte. Oil was now the number-one strategic target. It was to remain so almost until the end of the war, for the Germans performed such marvels of reconstruction and plant dispersion that repeated attacks were necessary to keep the refineries out of commission. For Erickson and his confederates there would be plenty of work in the months ahead.

By the middle of 1944, Erickson had been leading his dangerous double life for some three years. But now, with German oil production cut way down, he found it increasingly difficult to import oil to Sweden. He began to wonder when German oil would be embargoed altogether,

leaving him with no approved business reason for visiting the Reich.

It was at this point that the O.S.S. man, Philip Bowman, called Eric Erickson and Prince Carl to an important conference with Bradley and Mansfield. They discussed various strategies that would not only enable Erickson to continue to travel to Germany but would make it possible for him to survey the entire German oil industry. But nothing jelled.

The following evening the Prince had dinner at the Ericksons'. All three racked their brains for some plausible scheme.

"What the Nazis want now is not to sell oil but to get oil," Ingrid said. And then an idea came to Erickson.

"That's it!" he cried. "We'll offer *them* oil. We'll pretend that we're going to build a huge synthetic refinery here in Sweden, where it'll be safe from bombings. But first I'll have to survey *their* synthetic refineries and observe the various techniques so that I can decide which is best for us."

"Sounds as if it might work," Prince Carl said thoughtfully. "And why not have it financed partly with German capital? I'll bet some Nazi officials would welcome a patriotic excuse for investing funds in a neutral country. It might come in handy if Germany is defeated and they have to flee."

Erickson smacked his fist into his palm. "All in all," he said decisively, "this strikes me as the best idea yet."

THE AMERICAN Intelligence officers thought the phantom-refinery idea had merit. In a number of meetings they planned the details of the hoax, which they soon came to think of as "Operation Gasbag"—because all the Nazis were going to get out of it was a lot of hot air.

The project had to appear thoroughly sound, both technically and financially. Erickson and Prince Carl had to show a proper amount of self-interest. Also, they must make it appear highly probable that the Swedish government would approve the plan.

They prepared a complete prospectus, and then, helped by the American Embassy staff, they forged documents attesting to the pledged support of key Swedish investors. A letter was also forged from a key official of the State Bank of Sweden, promising approval of the necessary bank credits.

A series of memoranda, purporting to be the minutes of meetings held

with Swedish officials and businessmen, were composed to embody the problems which prospective Swedish investors could logically be expected to bring up. Since Swedish public opinion by this time was almost solidly anti-Nazi, the memoranda also incorporated clear assurances by Erickson and Prince Carl that all investors' names would be kept secret, and that government approval would be obtained in a hush-hush manner. On the other hand, in the bogus minutes, the "prospective investors" made it clear that, should any premature leak occur, they would deny having anything to do with the project and would refuse to support it. This was intended to deter German officials in Stockholm from checking with Swedes named in the minutes.

ERICKSON and Prince Carl decided not to launch the sales campaign for Operation Gasbag at Kortner's office in the German Legation. For the Regierungsrat would in all likelihood invite Ulrich to join him in considering such a major proposal, and Ulrich could be counted on to object. Instead they invited Kortner to dinner alone, and during the evening outlined the synthetic-oil-refinery project. Kortner sparked to the idea, immediately grasping all its advantages for the Third Reich and also as a safe, profitable investment for his high-echelon colleagues—and himself. He did raise various doubts about the project's feasibility, but Erickson and Prince Carl were able to reassure him convincingly on every point.

"You've really done some pretty thorough groundwork," Kortner said admiringly. Before the evening was over, he expressly stated that he would submit "our" project to Berlin with a strong, positive recommendation. But the next day Kortner asked Erickson and Prince Carl to come to his office. "My colleague Ulrich doesn't view our proposal too enthusiastically," he informed them. "I thought it best to have you present it to him yourself before I write to Berlin." Kortner had again used the pronoun "our" and his tone was somewhat ironical. He was obviously still in favour of the project.

Thanks to the care with which the prospectus had been developed, Erickson and Prince Carl were able to make mincemeat of Ulrich's objections. All three men maintained the façade of politeness, but it was obvious that Ulrich was boiling inside—and that Kortner was rather enjoying his colleague's discomfiture.

Finally Ulrich jumped up. "Gentlemen," he said. "I wash my hands of the whole affair. I know intuitively that there is something peculiar about it. What my colleague does is, of course, his own responsibility. Heil Hitler!" and he stalked from the room.

The upshot was that two separate reports on the proposal were sent to Berlin. One, from Kortner, went to Himmler's Gestapo Headquarters, and strongly recommended thorough consideration and exploration. The other, from Ulrich, went to Von Ribbentrop's Foreign Office, urging that immediate action be taken to scotch this impracticable plan.

By the summer of 1944 discrepancies in the views of Foreign Office and Gestapo officials were commonplace. Von Ribbentrop and Himmler were at odds personally and policy-wise.

WITHIN A week word came back that Baron von Nordhoff was interested in discussing the idea with Erickson.

Once again Erickson boarded the plane. In Berlin he presented the proposal for the synthetic refinery, with all the supporting documents, to Von Nordhoff and to various of his Gestapo associates, including a Dr. Teichmann. These men gave the project a careful preliminary scrutiny.

"So far, so good," Von Nordhoff finally said. "Now we'll see how Werner Olbricht reacts."

Erickson's hopes rose. He knew Olbricht, an administrator of the German synthetic-oil industry, slightly, and had intended to contact him on this very trip. He had always felt certain that the man was not a Nazi at heart. Back in 1941 he had thought of recruiting him, but some sixth sense had warned him against it then. Erickson had sensed at the time that Olbricht had not accepted his acquaintance's pro-Nazi attitude at face value. Yet he had felt fairly certain that Olbricht would not pass on his suspicions to the Gestapo. And he had been right.

Erickson reasoned that Olbricht would view the Swedish refinery project—stemming from a man whose loyalty to the Third Reich he doubted—with extreme scepticism. On the other hand, if he were told the truth and offered favourable post-war treatment of his family and protection of his property, for his co-operation, he might jump at the chance—for it would involve practically no risk. And it must have become clear to the man that Nazi defeat, sooner or later, was all but inevitable. So,

prior to the scheduled meeting, Erickson approached the German and put it to him straight from the shoulder.

Olbricht reacted with great caution, and asked many questions, carefully considering the risks, as well as the rewards to be garnered for himself and his family after the war. Finally he agreed to give the Swedish synthetic refinery his official endorsement.

The following evening Erickson, Baron von Nordhoff and Dr. Teichmann dined at Olbricht's home. That dinner cost Allied Intelligence three thousand kronor, for Von Nordhoff asked Erickson for a generous contribution to the Nazi Party charity, the *Winterhilfe*. But in Erickson's view the money was well spent. For that evening the Gestapo's tentative interest in the Swedish refinery turned into a decidedly warm one.

In the next few days, at Von Nordhoff's and Teichmann's suggestion, Erickson called on a number of department heads in order to get as much support as possible for the project before it was submitted to the top for Himmler's personal approval.

Baron von Nordhoff then told Erickson that things looked very promising but that while various cross-checks were being made the best thing for Erickson to do was to return to Stockholm. Erickson, however, requested, and was granted, permission to make a business trip. He visited several refineries and obtained reports from most of the members of his intelligence network, including Marianne, who had important information for him. She had obtained details on German plans for rebuilding some of the bombed refineries. She had even learned of a few that were to be reassembled underground to escape detection by Allied air reconnaissance.

On this particular occasion—one which Erickson later had cause to remember vividly—he and Marianne spent a little time together, the outside world completely banished for the while.

Now ERICKSON flew back to Stockholm and reported to the Americans and to Kortner on his favourable progress. But two impatient weeks went by without any word from Berlin.

When Kortner telephoned him one afternoon about the middle of September, Erickson could hardly suppress his eagerness.

"Eric," Kortner said, "how are you?"

"Fine, Wilhelm, fine."

"I'm afraid I have bad news for you. Holtz, that fellow you do business with in Hamburg, died yesterday of a heart attack."

The implications burst upon Erickson like a bombshell: *When a man dies his papers are examined by his wife and by lawyers.* And Holtz had had in his possession the certificate, signed by Erickson, attesting to his work for the Allies. When Holtz's wife, Klara, a devoted Nazi, came across that letter, she would certainly report the whole thing immediately to the Gestapo. If Erickson ventured into Germany again, he would be seized and shot as a spy.

"I guess that finishes it," Ingrid said that night when he told her the news. She made no effort to hide her relief.

"It can't!" Erickson cried angrily. "Not when so much depends on my continuing. There's only one way out of this thing. I've got to go to Hamburg immediately and see if I can't find that letter and destroy it."

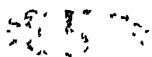
Ingrid's eyes widened in alarm. "You mean go back to Germany now? No, Eric, it's too dangerous!"

But Erickson felt that he had no alternative. He explained his plan to Bowman. He would go to Hamburg, and offer his help to Frau Holtz in going through her husband's papers. He would tell her that he and her husband had been partners in a private deal which would lead to a profit all round, and that he had left certain key documents with Holtz. "Klara Holtz has always been friendly with me," Erickson said. "I should be able to win her confidence."

Bowman thought the plan feasible but a long shot. He gave Erickson two contacts—one in Berlin and one in Hamburg—who might be able to help him in case he had to flee the country. He also explained the possible escape routes out of Germany. "Frankly, I don't see how you'll ever get a chance to make a run for it if they're on to you," Bowman added. "But you never know about luck. Hope you'll have all you need."

"Thanks," Erickson said.

Before he left, he took another precaution. He arranged a legitimate reason for cutting his visit to Germany short, if he felt at any point that discovery of his real role was imminent. A seemingly routine business cable from Erickson to Prince Carl would be the signal for Ingrid to become seriously ill and for her physician to cable immediately requesting Erickson's return.



THE S.D. AGENTS who always picked Erickson up at Tempelhof Airport drove him to the Hotel Eden as usual, and said Hugo Weber, a Gestapo official whom he knew, would telephone him there about the trip to Hamburg.

About half an hour later Erickson was called to the desk and was surprised to see Hugo Weber waiting for him. The Gestapo official greeted him warmly, then said: "Your Hamburg papers are being processed. Meanwhile, suppose you come along with me."

Following him, Erickson asked carefully, "What's this all about?"

"You'll see," Weber said cryptically.

In front of the hotel, a grey-uniformed S.D. officer flashed a Hitler salute and opened the door of a waiting black limousine. Weber gestured Erickson inside. Entering the car, he found himself staring into the immobile face of an S.D. officer seated in the back. And a moment later the first officer followed Erickson into the car. He was flanked by the Gestapo. Weber spoke through the window.

"Go along with them, Eric, I'll see you shortly."

And they drove off. Feeling like Daniel thrown to the lions, Erickson asked casually, "Where are we headed?"

"We are under orders to take you to Moabit Prison," one of the S.D. officers said.

"Moabit Prison? For what purpose?" Erickson asked, trying to keep the mounting anxiety out of his voice.

"We only have our orders," the officer replied.

So Ingrid had been right; he had put his head neatly into the waiting noose. He gauged the chances for a get-away. A sudden lunge might succeed. But they'd pick him off easily as he ran.

A few minutes later the huge red brick prison loomed up before them. Without explanation, Erickson was escorted into a room overlooking the large prison courtyard and left alone behind a locked door. Not a sound seeped in. Outside in the courtyard the sun glinted on the barrel of a machine-gun facing the wall. A sergeant appeared and began to load the gun.



Was he watching the preliminaries of his own execution? Only now did the possibility of his own death become a vivid reality. But they would first try to get information about his confederates. With an effort of will he focused on preparing a plan of action. He would play the innocent. If he were accused, he would answer calmly, saying, no, there must be some ridiculous mistake.

Two prison guards came in: "Come with us, please."

Steeling himself, Erickson accompanied them. They led him to the courtyard, where Hugo Weber was standing, together with Dr. Teichmann, three other Gestapo officials, and some thirty or forty other persons. As he entered, another door opened, admitting a group of prisoners under guard. Without conscious volition Erickson strode towards Weber and Teichmann, and waved a greeting. Weber nodded and led him to the front of the group.

Erickson nearly let out an audible sigh of relief. So he was only one of the spectators, not the star of this show. . . . But why? A second later the answer struck him with the impact of a bomb: *one of the prisoners about to be executed was Marianne*. A cry choked in his throat. Her

once-lustrous hair unkempt, haggard and clad in a shapeless prison dress, Marianne was still holding herself like the aristocrat she was.

A wave of fury overwhelmed Erickson. Wildly he thought of leaping forward, felling the soldier at the machine-gun with one blow and It was idiotic. He struggled to remain motionless.

Slowly Erickson let his eyes rove over the prisoners. His eyes met Marianne's, but she made no flicker of recognition. For one terrible instant he was tortured by the thought that she might think he had betrayed her. . . .

Was there nothing he could do to save her? Suppose he spoke up, pleaded for her life, requesting this one favour as a valued friend of the Reich? It was useless, he knew. Marianne was a member of a distinguished German family and had many high-placed friends who would have intervened in her behalf. The Gestapo must have conclusive evidence of her treason; her fate was sealed.

But why had he been brought here to watch her execution? Was the Gestapo trying to trap him into an exclamation of protest or recognition that would link him with Marianne? He cursed them silently.

Then, numbed, he heard, as though from a great distance, "*Warum machen sie schon nicht schnell?*" ("Why don't they get it over quickly?") The words were uttered in a distinct accent—either Danish or Norwegian. Erickson now noticed that the others in his group appeared to be mostly foreigners, like himself. Perhaps the Gestapo—convinced that the prisoners about to be executed worked secretly with foreign associates—had rounded up a whole group of foreigners, hoping to snare any guilty ones in this wide net, to trap them into making an involuntary sign of recognition.

He forced himself to gaze, not at the face he knew, but at the machine-gun glinting darkly in the bright sun, at the Gothic towers above the cobbled courtyard, at the red brick wall against which the prisoners were to be executed.

Now they were being lined up against the wall. The officer in charge came to full attention. Marianne deliberately raised her head a trifle higher, bracing herself against her fear.

"Thus die all traitors and enemies of the Reich," shouted the officer in charge. "Fire!"

In the second's pause before the machine-gun roared, Erickson wanted

to turn away, to keep the portrait of the Marianne he had loved untarnished by the image of her crumpling body. But in some indefinable way, he felt that to do so was to desert Marianne; she must *see* that she *lived* for him to the very last instant. As the bullets found their mark he was looking full into her eyes. Her body started with the shock, her face contorted, but no cry escaped her lips. Then she slumped with a violent half turn into a grotesque heap among her fellow prisoners.

When the bodies had been removed, the prison commandant strolled over and boomed to the assorted foreign friends of the Reich, "I hope you enjoyed it, gentlemen. Though I must say we had fewer histrionics than usual. But that is beyond our control."

So it had all, apparently, been just a "show," a vivid demonstration to a group of foreigners engaged in dealings with the Reich of what they would have coming to them if now, with the fortunes of the Wehrmacht waning, they should attempt to change horses in midstream.

Erickson was consumed with rage. Hundreds of times during the last three years he had ached to bash in the leering face of some Nazi official, to come to physical grips with the enemy instead of toadying to him. Now the desire was so strong that it caused him physical pain.

Then Weber was saying to him: "Drive over with me. Your papers should be all cleared by now. And"—he glanced at his watch—"you should be able to make the next train for Hamburg."

Later, on the train to Hamburg, sitting on the shabby, worn upholstery, his eyes closed, Erickson again saw Marianne crumpling with a half turn towards the wall; then her fearful, proud eyes. Dry-eyed, he felt limp and exhausted, like someone who had been sobbing for hours.

As the train pulled into Hamburg, Erickson, still emotionally numb, gazed upon the cruelly bombed city with indifferent eyes. At his hotel, he washed and changed, and composed himself for action. It was time to don his mask again. Perhaps it was already too late; perhaps the fatal letter was already on some lawyer's desk. He pushed the thought aside and telephoned Frau Klara Holtz.

"The news of Otto's death came as a terrible shock," Erickson told her truthfully, "and my thoughts turned at once to you, Klara. May I call on you this evening?"

"That is most kind of you, Eric. Do come—say about nine."

"ERIC! Thank you for coming," Klara said warmly as, promptly at nine o'clock, she opened the crape-decorated door to Erickson's ring. Her black mourning gown served admirably to set off her translucent skin, and her sparkling eyes betrayed no trace of redness.

She escorted him into the living-room, where Hans was standing, wearing a brown Hitler-youth uniform with a black band encircling his right sleeve. Eric had not seen the boy for almost two years. Like many other Hamburg children, he had been sent to the country to escape the Allied counter-Bltz.

"Good evening, Hans," he said, extending his hand. "I've come to offer my sympathy."

Hans shook his hand with obvious reluctance. In the past, when the youngster had been living at home, Erickson had frequently brought him sweets and other presents. But from their first meeting, when Hans had expressed his thoroughly Nazi views, Erickson had loathed the boy. Nor had Hans made a secret of his dislike for Erickson. Now, planted in an arm-chair, he scowled sullenly as Erickson talked sympathetically with Klara. Occasionally he cleaned his glasses. Feeling uncomfortable under the boy's scrutiny, Erickson tried to bring him into the conversation. "Hans has really developed splendidly," he said to Klara, smiling at the boy.

"Yes, he's quite a big boy," Klara said. "And a brave one too." She then suggested that Hans go to bed. The boy shook his head stubbornly, then stared deliberately at Erickson, as if to say, I won't go until he goes.

Klara laughed and went over and kissed him on the cheek. Then her voice assumed commanding accents. "Now do as I tell you. Say good night to Herr Erickson and be on your way."

Glaring at Erickson, Hans stalked from the room.

"I'm afraid Hans doesn't care for me," Erickson said.

Klara laughed apologetically. "It's just that he's so upset now." She gave a deep sigh. "You know, all this gloom isn't doing Otto a bit of good." She smiled warmly at Erickson. "For two days now I've been seeing nothing but his relatives." These were the words she spoke. But what her tone, her smile and her provocative manner said was: What's past is past. I'm an attractive young woman with a whole life ahead of me. Sir, it's your move.

Erickson, repelled by her callousness, wondered what she hoped for from him. Well, whatever her aim, it was up to him to be properly agreeable, in spite of his melancholy mood.

So he played the debonair man-of-the-world, shading his manner, however, with consideration for her recent loss. Encouraged by his sympathetic interest, she recounted the ups and down of her life: her father's death during the First World War; her ambitions to be an actress side-tracked because she had to work in a department store to help support her mother and a younger sister. As the evening wore on and Klara revealed herself bit by bit, an odd thing occurred: from a well-known type, shallow and calculating, Klara was gradually transformed for Erickson into a human being, a woman with frailties and strengths and needs—including the need to be loved. His show of sympathy for her was no longer wholly contrived. It was easy for him to say, "I'll be in Hamburg a few more days, and I'll be returning frequently. Please count on me to help in any way I can."

Finally, as he rose to go, Erickson casually voiced the question he had been waiting to ask all evening:

"I don't suppose anyone's even touched Otto's papers yet?"

She shook her head. "Otto's lawyer will get to it in a few days."

"Otto and I were involved in a private deal," Erickson went on, "involving a new firm being formed in Stockholm; and I left some papers pertaining to it with him. Needless to say, I'll carry the deal through with you as my partner now." He smiled warmly and bent down to kiss her softly on the cheek. "The project will prove profitable for us both," he continued. "But it needs to be acted on immediately. Otherwise I wouldn't bring it up at this time."

"Of course. I understand, Eric."

Next morning Erickson attended Otto Holtz's funeral with Klara and young Hans. At lunch afterwards, Erickson thought he could still detect a gleam of suspicion behind the boy's glasses. Deliberately, he plied Hans with questions about his school and reciprocated by telling some of his own adventures in the Orient. Hans displayed a polite interest. But when the meal was over and he went upstairs to study, Erickson breathed a sigh of relief.

Now, with a firm show of protective, masculine authority, Erickson insisted on helping Klara go through her husband's papers—insurance

policies, contracts, records of investments, all readily accessible in unlocked drawers in the desk. Otto would never have secreted a dangerous document there; Erickson was stalling, and finally his stalling achieved its objective. Klara, becoming bored with the routine sifting job, went off to take care of household affairs, leaving him to carry on. But before she left he asked her casually for the combination of a small safe on which his hopes were centred.

As soon as Erickson was alone, he opened the safe. Then he reached inside, gathered together all the envelopes it contained and carried them to the desk. He began going through them rapidly. He was only part way through the pile when, glancing up, he was startled to find himself being intently scrutinized by Hans. The boy had approached so stealthily that Erickson had not heard a sound. Now the youngster rushed forward to see what was inside the open safe.

"Hans, I'll have to ask you to leave me to my work," Erickson said commandingly. "Your father would have wanted us to carry on directly. Later, when I'm finished, we might take a walk together."

Firmly he led the reluctant boy out of the room and closed the door. Then he resumed his swift search. To his dismay there was no trace of the letter. He began looking about for other hiding places. He examined the backs of pictures, the books in a small bookshelf. He checked the envelopes again. The letter was not there.

Deliberately, he set himself to actually examine some of the papers for Klara. When she returned to the study, bringing drinks for both of them, he gave her some detailed advice on how best to handle Otto's estate. Then he said, "Klara, one thing I haven't come across yet—the documents I gave Otto on our private deal. Isn't there any other place in the house where he might have put them?"

She started to say no, then exclaimed suddenly, "Oh, there was a small locked box he kept in a chest by the side of his bed."

"That may be it," Erickson replied. She brought him the box but held on to a ring of keys. That was bad, Erickson thought. Once the box was opened, Klara would almost certainly look over his shoulder as he examined the contents. It was a tribute, in a sense, to Klara Holtz that, were she to see the letter, Erickson was certain she would unhesitatingly cut herself off from the post-war benefits it promised by turning him in to the Gestapo.

He extended his hand for the keys and Klara dropped them into his palm. Step number one completed, he thought with relief; now to prolong the opening process a bit. He would find the right key, pass it by for the moment. One by one he tried the keys. But *none* of them worked. The lock could probably be forced. He was about to reach for the jack-knife he always carried with him, but thought better of it. "No luck?" Klara asked.

"If you'll get me a screwdriver, I think I can get this open."

The instant Klara left the room, Erickson attacked the box with his knife. Working feverishly, he managed to force the lock just as Klara returned with the screwdriver.

Keeping the box firmly closed with one hand, he took the screwdriver with the other. "I was trying it with my knife, but this'll be much better," he said. Then: "While you're up, Klara, would you mind getting me a little more coffee?"

"Of course, Eric." Klara once more left the room.

Eagerly Erickson lifted the lid. Had he drawn a blank? No papers of any kind were inside—just some old cuff links; an assortment of foreign coins; three or four keys. . . . Keys to what? One had a number on it. *That was it.* A safe-deposit-box key! Here, in his hands, might be the answer he was so desperately seeking. But Erickson's elation was short-lived. The key, he realized a moment later, was of no earthly use to him. He did not know at which bank the box was. And it would involve all sorts of legal red tape for Klara, as heir, to get permission to open the box, while for tax purposes officials would probably have to stand by to check the contents. Perhaps he ought to pocket the key and say nothing about it to Klara. But to what purpose? The Holtz solicitor would soon be apprised of the box by the bank.

"Here's your coffee, Eric," Klara called as she came into the room. Then, seeing the box was open, "What luck?"

"The papers are not here, but this key may lead us to them."

Erickson explained to her that it might be several weeks before the safe-deposit box could be legally opened; and then it would be too late to put over the Stockholm deal he and Otto had been planning. "Were you and Otto, by any chance, friendly with any of the officials at Otto's bank?" he asked.

"Yes, Max Eckhof, the assistant manager, has been here for dinner a

number of times. I think he rather likes me." Klara smiled coquettishly.

"Then if this key belongs to a box in his bank, Eckhof might be agreeable to, say, overlooking an unimportant regulation or two for the sake of a very charming young widow."

Klara smiled knowingly. "I think it's quite possible."

Erickson calculated rapidly. Aloud he said: "I think I've got it worked out, Klara. Suppose you telephone Eckhof now. Ask him to call you back from outside the bank as soon as he can. Then you can explain why you need to see Otto's papers at once."

Klara was put through to Eckhof without any delay. Within less than half an hour he telephoned back. Klara posed the problem while Erickson stood by.

"Otto had a safe-deposit box at your bank, I believe," she began, and mentioned the key number. She smiled and nodded at something Eckhof said. Then she went on to explain the financial gains she would forfeit if she did not obtain immediate access to the box. As Erickson had anticipated, Eckhof balked at doing something irregular. Whereupon Klara used a typical womanly wile: "But Max, surely a man in your important position can arrange the thing easily. After all, Max, who will ever know? Couldn't you stay a bit late at the bank this afternoon, and help me out? . . . I would appreciate it very much, very much indeed. Now that Otto is gone I hope I can rely on your to"—here she winked at Erickson—"advise me on financial affairs. . . . Perhaps you can come over for dinner soon, so we can discuss it at leisure."

The bait was obvious, and Eckhof swallowed it whole. He would be able to take care of the matter that very afternoon, he said. Would she come to the side door about five fifteen?

"Wonderful!" Klara cried, then added, as Erickson had suggested: "You know, I think rather than coming myself, I'll get Herr Erickson, Otto's associate, to come. You know him, of course."

Erickson could hear Eckhof objecting: "Yes, but——"

"It's difficult for me to get away now," Klara said. "Besides, don't you think it would be better that way for you too? No one will connect Herr Erickson with Otto's safe-deposit box. About five fifteen then? Thank you, Max, ever so much. Come and see me soon now."

"You were wonderful!" Erickson cried, putting his arms round Klara and this time kissing her with real enthusiasm.

LATER in the day, the smooth course of affairs was interrupted. As Erickson was getting ready to leave for the bank, Hans announced: "I will go with Herr Erickson to see what Papa left us in the box."

Erickson tried to casually brush aside his request. "You'd just be bored, Hans," he said. "As soon as I get back, all three of us together will go over what is in the box."

"But I want to see the box opened," Hans said determinedly. "You told me you'd take me for a walk. Now you won't. Is there something of Papa's you want to steal for yourself?"

"Hans!" Klara cried sharply. "Apologize this instant."

But Hans was stubborn. Fearing that Klara might decide to come along herself, Erickson said, "Oh, well, let the boy come, Klara. It's only natural for him to be interested in his father's affairs."

With a child for his antagonist, Erickson felt like a fool. They walked along together in silence. In Hamburg the Alster River winds through the city and there is a regular water-bus service. Erickson and Hans boarded one of the boats. They left it in the centre of Hamburg, and walked down the road to the bank. At the side entrance, Eckhof himself opened the door. When he noticed Hans, he looked startled, but he gestured them inside. "You'll have to wait here," Eckhof said to Hans, indicating a leather chair on the main floor. "Children are not allowed where we are going." Eckhof obviously did not want his illegal act to be observed by a child, who might talk.

"I am not a child," Hans said angrily.

"The boy knows I'm getting something for his mother and he wants to see that I bring it all safely to her," Erickson said. Then, turning to Hans, "If Herr Eckhof assures you that he will stay with me and guard your mother's interests, will that satisfy you?"

"You have my word on it, Hans," Herr Eckhof assured the boy.

Hans gave a sharp nod. "I accept," he said, and sat down stiffly.

When the box was opened, Erickson was relieved to see that it contained not just one envelope but a whole portfolio. Firmly but without haste he picked up the packet to forestall any examination of it by Herr Eckhof.

"Thank you," Erickson said. "Frau Holtz will be most grateful for this favour." Outside again he suggested to Hans: "It's such a nice day, let's walk at least part of the way."

Erickson was stalling for time while trying to hit on some means of getting away from the boy long enough to search the portfolio. He must find or make an opening for action. But as they cut through one of the many small parks in which Hamburg abounds, it was Hans who found the opening. He pointed to a passing tram-car and asked, "Are the *Strassenbahnen* in Stockholm the same as ours?"

"Not quite the same. You see, the——" began Erickson, involuntarily glancing at the tram-car.

In that instant Hans snatched the portfolio out of Erickson's hand and bolted. For a moment Erickson stood there, frozen. Then he found his voice. "Hans!" he shouted angrily, and sprinted after the boy.

The side street leading from the square was empty, but Erickson realized that in a few moments Hans would reach the main avenue, where he could lose himself in the crowd. His heart pounding, Erickson began to shout as loudly as he could: "Stop that boy!"

At the intersection people turned to stare, but no one moved towards Hans as he dashed round the corner. Desperately, Erickson continued to call out as he ran: "*Stop that boy! Somebody stop that boy!*"

Now the startled passers-by took up the refrain: "Stop that boy!" Swinging round the corner, Erickson saw Hans run full tilt into the arms of a stout, grey-haired woman.

"Hold on to him!" Erickson shouted.

Reaching the struggling pair, he seized Hans with one hand and tore the portfolio from his grasp with the other. Curious onlookers gathered about them. "A thief?" the woman asked.

"No, he's with me. Just playing a foolish prank. He's a good boy, though, when he's asleep, *Vielen Dank, gnädige Frau.*" Then to the boy: "Come along now, Hans."

With the portfolio safely in his possession again, Erickson managed to suppress his anger. Across the street, he spied a restaurant. He took the boy by the arm. "Let's stop in there, Hans, and have a little snack."

As they stepped inside, Erickson noted that the lavatory was at the back to the left; he chose a table for two against the left wall and took the seat facing the entrance. The portfolio rested on his lap, gripped tightly with one hand. When the waitress, a wrinkled turnip of a woman, began slowly transferring their food from her tray to the table,

she effectively blocked the aisle. At that instant Erickson jumped up and headed for the lavatory, saying, "I'll be right back." He pushed open the men's-room door, stepped inside, and bolted the door.

As he opened the portfolio, he heard the door being tried; then Hans's voice: "Let me in, Herr Erickson. Let me in."

"You'll have to wait a moment, Hans," he said.

Going rapidly through the portfolio, Erickson picked out three sealed envelopes. In the first was somebody's I.O.U.

Now Hans was pounding on the door and crying: "Let me in, I've got to come in. *Please*, Herr Erickson, let me in."

The brat's not a bad actor, Erickson thought. He called out, "I'm sorry, Hans, I can't let you in yet."

He slit open the second envelope. There it was, his own familiar handwriting. His eyes took in the damning phrases and his own signature, bold and clear at the bottom. He lit a match and touched it to the signed death warrant, placing the piece of paper carefully in the dry portion of the toilet bowl. As he watched the letter burn to ash he tore the two envelopes he had unsealed into shreds. Then with enormous relief he flushed away the last remnants of the evidence.

He stuffed the other envelope and the I.O.U. back into the portfolio and closed it. Then he flung open the door. "It's all yours," he said, waving Hans inside. Erickson felt elated and triumphant, like a gambler who has just taken in a big pot on pure bluff. He loved everything and everybody—the wrinkled old waitress, the atrocious ersatz coffee, the stale bun, even apprentice Gestapo agent Hans Holtz.

When they arrived home, Hans was honoured with the job of opening all the sealed envelopes. "No sign of the papers relating to our deal," Erickson told Klara, frowning. "I'm afraid this means I'll have to cut my visit short."

"Oh, no, Eric," Klara cried in dismay.

Erickson nodded. "This deal is important for *both* of us, Klara. But I'll be able to get back soon, I'm sure," he added, reassuringly.

Before Erickson left Hamburg that evening, he was able to reach his remaining German confederate there, and to make certain this man's letter would be readily accessible to him in case of an emergency. At the first opportunity he planned to take care of the matter with his confederates in other cities.

02600

THE NEXT day at Gestapo Headquarters in Berlin, Baron von Nordhoff and Dr. Teichmann both welcomed him.

"I have good news for you, Eric," Von Nordhoff informed him. "Reichsführer Himmler himself wishes to discuss the refinery proposal with you. He will be in Berlin tomorrow."

"Excellent," Erickson exclaimed, but he thought, this could be risky: the Gestapo chief was known to be ultra-cautious, often indecisive. If Erickson should displease him, or if Himmler should happen to be in a bad mood—it was rumoured that he suffered from severe headaches—he might summarily veto the deal.

Next morning two uniformed S.D. men drove Erickson to Gestapo Headquarters. After the black-uniformed guards at the familiar door had examined his papers and methodically searched him for concealed weapons, an S.S. official took Erickson in tow. As they walked through the stone corridors towards Himmler's offices, Erickson reminded himself that the man he was going to see was, next to Hitler, the most powerful figure in Nazi Germany. He found himself inadvertently overawed. So he began to dip into his mental files on Himmler in order to bring the man down a peg or two.

Born a Catholic, but now a violent enemy of the Church, a one-time poultry farmer, Himmler was just forty-four years old. He was ruthless, Hitler's most uncritical yes-man; he was also a romantic visionary who thought of himself as a reincarnation of the first Saxon king, Heinrich I, and who considered his S.S. to be modelled on the ancient Order of Teutonic Knights.

Erickson summoned up the man's well-known features: a weak chin and puffy pale face; weak-sighted eyes behind glittering pince-nez; and a shadow-wisp of a Hitlerian moustache.

Von Nordhoff had once told him that in years past Himmler had turned the park at the back of the Gestapo building into an outdoor gym, where all S.S. officers were ordered to work out regularly until they qualified for the "Sports Badge." Himmler himself had tried, for many afternoons, to meet the S.S. standards he had set in the hundred metre

dash, the high jump and so forth—all in vain. Erickson smiled at this picture. Good, he was cutting the man down to size.

They were approaching a door flanked by two tall, blond armed sentries, who Hitler-saluted Erickson's guide. Again guards frisked him and examined his attaché-case.

Weber, and Von Nordhoff, who were waiting there for him, now ushered him into an ante-room. A moment later the carved oaken door which led to Himmler's private office swung open and an aide invited Erickson inside. Sporting a brisk, confident smile, he stepped into the cavernous office of the Chief of the Gestapo.

It was a large, high-ceilinged room, panelled in light oak to about half its height. A life-size portrait of Hitler stared down from one wall. Next to it hung a huge map of the world. Himmler, wearing his S.S. uniform, sat behind a massive desk conversing with several of his aides. As he greeted Erickson, his manner was mild, almost punctilious. "Welcome, Herr Erickson," he said. His voice was small and somewhat high. "I've heard fine things about you from my staff." Then, to his aides, "Leave me with Herr Erickson. I will call you later."

Erickson glanced about the office. On a conference table he noted an ornamental dress-sword, in a black, silver-studded scabbard. One of the walls was decorated with a number of burnished shields and plaques, no doubt part of Himmler's famous ancient Germanic collection. As the assistants gathered up their papers, Erickson strolled over to one of these shields and examined it with interest. Himmler, he had been told, had a habit of launching into little lectures on his various favourite topics. Giving him an opening to do so might help to put him in a pleasant, receptive mood.

"You are interested in Germanic heraldry, Herr Erickson?" Himmler asked when the aides had left.

"I know practically nothing about it," Erickson replied truthfully, "but that shield has something of the quality of certain medieval tapestries in our Stockholm museum."

"Really?" Himmler said in a tone of non-committal politeness. "I find that such symbols of a great heroic age provide an all-important sense of history in one's daily work. They strip away the decadence that overlies so much of our civilization."

"Yes," Erickson said, "I think it was seeing that shield in a modern setting that drew me to it."

Himmler looked at him carefully. "You seem to have an affinity for historical study, Herr Erickson," he said. "But now let us talk about your proposal." He opened a folder which had been lying on his desk, and, smiling, looked at a poster of a tanker Erickson had included in his presentation. "My staff thinks the project has some worth-while elements," he said. "But one must consider such a matter with care."

They discussed the proposal for some minutes. Himmler leaned back in his chair, legs crossed, and listened attentively as Erickson reviewed the advantages of a Swedish refinery. Occasionally, the Gestapo chief posed a query or made some comment which displayed an intelligent grasp of the technical points involved. Finally he nodded and said:

"Yes, something like this should have useful propaganda effects." He tapped the tips of his short fingers together. "It will demonstrate our firm belief in a German victory—a victory that is absolutely essential if civilization is to be preserved from the Bolshevist-Jewish hordes that threaten to engulf us all. We will win that victory because we *must* win."

His voice had gradually assumed a shrill harshness. As he continued, boasting of new, secret weapons being developed under his supervision, Erickson wondered: Is this for my benefit? Does he really believe it?

"Yes, our great cause shall triumph," the S.S. chief was saying. "And I've been preparing and planning for the day." He pointed to some photographs of horses lying on the desk. "I've been having a new breed of horses developed, for my S.S. to use in patrolling the Siberian steppes. Winter-hardy horses that will also provide food—milk and cheese. I have bloodstock gathered from all over the world, and we are cross-breeding them to develop the necessary qualities."

Examining the photographs, Erickson said appreciatively, "Excellent specimens, all of these." He pointed to a thoroughbred. "Remarkably deep chest. And the length from hip to hock is especially long but quite in proportion. Beautiful."

"You're a connoisseur, I see," Himmler said.

"Yes," Erickson said truthfully. "I raise horses myself—on a modest scale. I have a couple of jumpers and several saddle-horses on my farm near Krokeke."

"Excellent!" Himmler said. "It is extremely important to maintain



our contact with the soil, and to renew ourselves from the prime source of strength—Mother Earth.” He rose from his desk and began to outline the various bloodstock combinations his experts had tried—everything from Palomino to Shetland with Tibetan breeds, draught types and thoroughbreds predominating. Doesn’t the man realize, Erickson thought, that everything he’s saying about cross-breeding directly contradicts the official Nazi notions about “pure races” like the Aryan, and the inferior “mixed races”? Suddenly Erickson had the eerie feeling that, for the moment, a lunatic was confronting him, a man wholly out of touch with reality. He was lecturing about horses being bred to help him rule a Siberian empire at a time when the Wehrmacht was being pushed back towards the borders of Germany, and huge fleets of Allied bombers were smashing daily at the Reich’s essential war industries.

As Himmler delivered his discourse on the principles of breeding superior horses and superior races of men and on the inevitability of a German victory, Erickson ventured only an occasional guarded comment. He felt himself on a tight-rope, as though everything somehow hinged on the successful outcome of this weird exchange. And then an odd thing happened: Himmler had shifted to generalizing about the importance of thorough planning. In the midst of these pompous platitudes, his voice trailed off. With head slightly bent, he stood next to the long conference table, stock still, seemingly holding communion with his victory-fantasy in private.

For some moments Erickson said nothing. Idly, musingly, Himmler began to caress the handle of the dress-sword that lay in its scabbard on the table. Afraid that the crucial transition, which seemed imminent, might take a wrong turn, Erickson used the first conversational bridge he could think of. He said: “Unquestionably, proper planning is essential. And the refinery we propose to erect fits in precisely with that sort of thorough planning.”

For an interminable few seconds Himmler continued to remain silent, one hand resting on the sword hilt. Then he nodded, first slowly, as though still occupied with his own secret thoughts, then with greater animation.

“Ja, it has definite possibilities, this oil refinery of yours,” he said and, stepping over to his desk, he sat down, picked up the folder and glanced through it again. “Ribbentrop’s people, however, don’t seem to agree

with my staff about it." He waved the objection aside. "Diplomats are among the most stupid people on earth. When it comes to practical affairs, they are useless." •

Erickson held his breath momentarily in order to suppress a deep sigh of relief. Apparently this part was going to be all right. Firmly he began summing up the advantages of the project.

Himmler, however, interrupted. "Unquestionably, it's an excellent idea," he said. He indicated the poster of the tanker, and expressed his approval of the artist's rendering.

The expert salesman's usual procedure when the customer appears sold is to get the order form signed and leave at once. But Erickson's strategy now was to appear to back away from the deal. His real goal was to win Himmler's authorization for an inspection tour of a number of German oil refineries. "There's one more thing," he said. "I myself am not exactly an expert on synthetic-oil production, and I think it would really be best if I saw the different types of operations at first hand."

With a wave of his hand Himmler cut him short. "Don't worry. We'll put the best experts at your disposal."

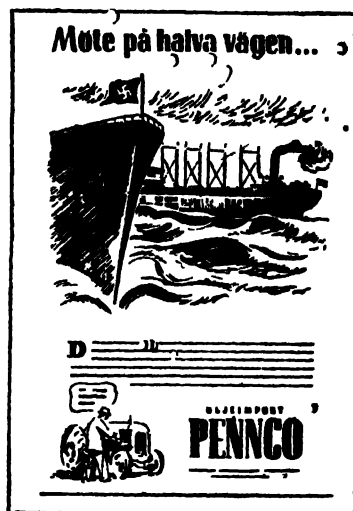
"I'm counting on that, of course," replied Erickson. "But I've found—as I'm sure you have—that experts in any field sometimes go off the deep end. That's why I always make it a rule to know the over-all picture personally."

"All right, have it your way," Himmler said. "I must say I admire your thoroughness. I'm a stickler for it myself. But then I'm German."

And now Erickson again used the technique of "closing on a minor point" to get the order form signed. "I suppose," he said to Himmler, "there should be no reference in my official travelling papers to our refinery plans until we are ready to announce it publicly."

Himmler nodded. "You are right, it would be premature."

He then called in Baron von Nordhoff and told him to arrange a series



The tanker sketch which impressed Himmler in Erickson's presentation.

of special passes that would permit Erickson to travel in the interest of the Reich all over Germany—and German-held areas—and to inspect anything and everything he wanted to see, at any refineries he cared to visit. The usual security regulations were to be waived. Erickson walked out of Gestapo Headquarters feeling like the cat who has swallowed the cream—all the cream in the dairy.

THAT SAME afternoon Erickson and Gerhard von Oldenbourg sat on a bench in the Tiergarten. Some time before this, Erickson had taken Von Oldenbourg fully into his confidence and had told him the names of the other recruits. If Erickson were to die, Von Oldenbourg had agreed to carry on the work in collaboration with Prince Carl. They mapped out a wide-ranging tour of the Nazi synthetic-oil industry, and that evening Erickson set off. As a foreign V.I.P. on a confidential mission endorsed by Himmler, he was, of course, treated with the greatest courtesy by the refinery executives, and he was able to ask and get answers to a broad range of questions. He was extremely careful to obtain the strategic information which he sought in an off-hand manner, sandwiching his questions in among those items bearing directly on his ostensible purpose. He also gleaned much, of course, from personal observation. Passing by some wrecked equipment, it was natural to ask how soon the director expected to have it operating again. Thus, he began to collect a mass of invaluable data on each plant.

ON THE third day of his trip Erickson began to suspect that he was being shadowed. A man of medium height, in a blue suit and grey hat, was skilfully following him, always keeping him just within sight. As an innocent man, Erickson would have to ignore his shadower. But from now on he would have to exercise extreme caution.

Was this a special Gestapo check-up ordered by Himmler, Erickson wondered—or were Ulrich and the Foreign Office behind it? In each city he visited from then on, and even on trains, Erickson would sooner or later become aware of watchful eyes keeping him well in view. Several times, too, his hotel room was painstakingly searched. Each time some clothing was missing, an obvious attempt to make it appear a case of petty robbery. All this surveillance, in addition to its effect on his nerves, made it much more dangerous for him to contact Allied agents, as had

lately been arranged for him, and to pass on his information for coded transmission by radio.

It was always Erickson who was to make the approach, telephoning a certain number and giving a predetermined name and reason for the call. Then in a restaurant or hotel lobby he would "forget" an apparently innocent self-reminder list or itinerary plan to be picked up inconspicuously by the next person who sat there, or at a certain street corner a stranger would ask for the time or a light.

But now, after the initial call, Erickson was frequently unable to shake off his shadower and had to pass up the rendezvous.

Meetings in local bordellos proved to be the safest to manage. Often Erickson's shadower simply waited in the street. In Hanover, however, the local shadower followed him right inside. Erickson bought the man a beer and exchanged jokes with him before ostentatiously going upstairs. Whistling exuberantly, he met the Allied agent, as planned, in the semi darkness of the upstairs passage and then whispered data on two key refineries in his ear.

ALTHOUGH Erickson was carrying out Operation Gasbag pretty much inside a goldfish bowl, he soon came to take that as part of the day's work. Then, one evening a voice from the dead called out his name.

He was walking along a busy street in Leipzig, his local shadower some distance behind. For the moment he was able to pretend to himself that the war did not exist, that he was just a tourist in the picturesque old city where Bach and Goethe, Schiller and Wagner and Mendelssohn had lived and worked.

"Erickson! Fancy meeting you here," a voice boomed, and a huge hand clapped him on the back.

Erickson turned, and forced himself to mask his astonishment and fear and to smile a greeting. "Franz Schroeder, of all people!"

Schroeder was a massive man, an ardent Nazi, who had frequently tangled with Erickson on oil deals in pre war days. He had become particularly hostile after Erickson had beaten him out of a lucrative contract by teaming up with an Englishman who also happened to be a Jew. Later, Erickson had heard that Schroeder had died.

"What the devil are you doing in Germany?" Schroeder said suspiciously.

"Qh, that's a bit of a story. Now that we're both on the same side, let's bury the hatchet. I'll buy you a drink and tell you about it."

"All right." Schroeder's eyes narrowed. "I'm really curious to hear how one day you're working hand in glove with the *verdammte Juden* and the next day you're hooked up with our side."

From their corner table in the tavern Erickson caught a glimpse of his shadower taking up his post across the street. He realized suddenly that unconsciously he had *counted* on Schroeder's being dead when he had agreed to serve as a spy. For Schroeder had been the one important Nazi in the German oil industry to whom he had betrayed his loathing for anti-Semitism and National Socialism.

As the waiter brought their drinks, Erickson's thoughts raced. With Ulrich already against him, with people shadowing him wherever he went, he could not afford to have another finger of suspicion pointing at him. An old-line loyal Nazi like Schroeder must have many influential friends in Berlin. A tenacious, suspicious man, sparked by personal hatred, could set off a new investigation that, somewhere along the line, would trap him. He had pictured himself to the Gestapo as a man who had always sympathized with the Nazis. Suppose Schroeder called his pre-war picture of Erickson to Himmler's personal attention? Grimly, he realized how urgent it was to quell Schroeder's suspicions. He took a realistic tack. He explained that he had been doing business with the Germans ever since 1940.

"With me, Schroeder, business is business," Erickson said. "When I saw that you people really had the stuff to make a go of it, I threw my fortunes in with your side. Believe me, I've been doing very well." He also let it be known that he was on the Allied black list, implying that he had reached the point of no return.

"Ja, you're a shrewd one, Erickson," Schroeder said, his tone tinged with contempt. "Tell me, what are you doing in Leipzig?"

Erickson decided to try to overwhelm the man's distrust with the facts. He confided that he was here in connection with a confidential project that Himmler had personally approved.

Schroeder looked at him quizzically. "Well, finding you here in Germany was startling enough, Erickson. But then to learn that you're working closely with the S.S. Chief himself Frankly, it's—would you mind showing me your papers?"

Erickson laughed. "Not at all. Here, take a look for yourself."

Schroeder's face, as he glanced at Erickson's passes, registered appropriate respect. "You are certainly operating on a very high level," he said, handing back the papers. He was apparently impressed; yet, as they left the tavern together, Erickson felt cold with the conviction that he had failed. At the corner they said, "*Auf Wiedersehen*," and headed off in different directions. In a few minutes, Erickson felt certain, Schroeder would be reporting his suspicions to the local Gestapo office. Somehow he had to be stopped. But already in the early dusk, Erickson could glimpse his shadower across the street taking up the trail.

Passing a hotel, Erickson stopped suddenly. He snapped his fingers as though he had just remembered something urgent and dashed inside. He cut through the lobby and out of a side door in the direction Schroeder had taken. Luck was with him. A taxi was just discharging two passengers. He leaped in, flashed his Gestapo clearance, and commanded, "Straight ahead, driver. I'm late."

Unobtrusively he glanced out of the rear window. His shadower was nowhere in sight. He glanced anxiously along both sides of the street. He had left Schroeder only a minute or two ago; if he were walking in this direction he should have seen him by now. At that instant, just beyond a cross street, he caught sight of him lumbering along. "Turn at the next block and stop," Erickson ordered.

When the driver slammed on his brakes, Erickson handed him a note and leaped out. The taxi drove off and Erickson began to trail his man, keeping close to the buildings. He reached into his trouser-pocket for his jack-knife, and transferred it to his coat pocket. Somewhere in the next few blocks he must find an opportune moment.

He hurried now, gaining ground. Lord, that Schroeder was a behemoth. If he did get a chance to strike, would he be able to bring it off? The thought of killing a fellow human being made him feel queasy. He would have to make his rush soon, strike quickly, and run for it. And then Schroeder altered his plan: he stepped into a phone booth, the large outdoor type common in Europe.

Stealthily, hugging the buildings, Erickson edged quickly forward. The semi-opaque glass of the booth screened him from Schroeder's view. But the German had the door half ajar; dim blue light seeped out from the black-out bulb. Erickson circled the booth warily, his right hand



gripping the closed knife in his pocket. Now he heard Schroeder's guttural voice saying: "Schroeder here . . . glad you are still at the office, Konrad. . . . Listen, I'm coming right over to see you about a man who I'm certain is an enemy agent. . . . Yes. It'll be a real feather in your cap to make him talk because he is——"

At that instant Erickson's arm flashed through the air. One end of the heavy knife handle struck the point where Schroeder's head met his neck—once, and then again. Schroeder's massive body slumped into Erickson's arms. Erickson braced it with his own against one of the booth walls. He pressed the button in the knife handle, releasing the blade for action.

"Having some trouble here?" a voice asked from the darkness. Erickson's heart stopped in the middle of a beat. A man's bulk was looming up a few feet away . . . uniformed . . . an elderly policeman. The naked blade was ready; could he strike both men down and make a run for it?

"Just a moment, Gerda.

Excuse me one second, please," Erickson said cleanly into the mouthpiece. At the same time he slipped the knife into Schroeder's coat pocket and, with the arm encircling Schroeder's neck, reached the receiver hook and clicked it down, disconnecting the Gestapo. Then, placing his other hand over the mouthpiece, he said, laughing: "Oh, no trouble, really. My friend here just had a few too many, I'm afraid. I'm making some excuses to his wife."

"I see," the policeman said, still keeping his distance. "Do you need any help?"

"No, thank you," Erickson said. "I can manage him. I'll take him to my hotel and sober him up."

"Ah, you are really a good friend," the policeman said. But he made no move to go.

Keeping his left arm round Schroeder's neck, his thumb alert to press the windpipe at the first sign of returning consciousness, Erickson took his other hand off the mouthpiece and put the receiver to his ear.

"Ja, Gerda," he said into the mouthpiece. "Franz asked me to telephone for him because this special conference



will go on for some hours. Yes. They will have dinner in the office. . . . How are the children?"

At last the policeman ambled off.

Erickson's temples throbbed violently. His left hand pressed Schroeder's mouth tight to seal the death cry; his right hand picked the knife out of Schroeder's pocket, hesitated a moment, then plunged the blade into Schroeder's left breast. Erickson felt the recoil of the massive body he was bracing: the blade flashed again, and once again. . . . Then his left hand felt for Schroeder's heart: it was still. Erickson pulled clear of the body he had been supporting against the wall; it sagged in a heap to the floor of the booth.

He had killed a man.

Then the consoling thought came: This is war. Then: It was him or me. Then: One for Marianne.

Only now, as he sped away in the darkness, was he aware of the open knife he held, of the stickiness on his hands. He wiped the blade and his hands, closed and pocketed the knife. A tourist in Leipzig, he thought bitterly, just a tourist in old Leipzig.

ERICKSON left the city on the first train out. At the station he was aware that his shadower was again watching him. He leaned back in his compartment, deathly weary. But he could not sleep. Had the killing really been necessary? Couldn't he have convinced Schroeder of his genuineness? Before Schroeder's death he had conferred upon him a wife, named Gerda, and children—had the man had a wife and children of his own? He was glad he did not know.

Perhaps this act of violence would prove his own undoing. His shadower's report would include seeing Erickson in a stout man's company, then losing his trail. If Konrad—the Gestapo man Schroeder was telephoning—saw that report, might he not put two and two together, and

Erickson knew he was torturing himself needlessly. For his own safety, for the sake of his present mission, he had *had* to kill. And the chances of "Konrad's" ever seeing his shadower's report were slim. Besides, what proof would they have? He had tossed the knife into a river the train had just crossed. At the first opportunity he would also dispose of the clothes he had worn, so that no minute blood traces could

give him away. There was nothing more he could do—except leave Germany as soon as possible. . . .

No, he would see it through. But he would speed up his schedule. He had a feeling his luck might be running out.

SHORTLY thereafter, Erickson completed his survey. In his head he carried precise data on many of the important German synthetic refineries. Travelling with Himmler's personal approval, he had picked up some additional information. At Berchesgrun, for example, Erickson had been invited to visit a huge, secret Ganheim plant, where eight thousand workers were producing jet-plane engines. This item was of particular importance because the possibilities of the German's putting a large force of jet fighters into the air posed a considerable danger to the Allies during the autumn of 1944. And at Ludwigshafen and Friedrichshafen, he was privileged to watch secret tests of the new German jets, screaming past at nearly four hundred and fifty miles an hour.

Erickson returned to Berlin on a brilliant morning in the latter part of October 1944, triumphant but weary, eager to return to Sweden immediately. Von Oldenbourg, to whom he had telegraphed, was waiting on the platform when the train pulled in. The moment Erickson caught sight of his face he knew something had gone wrong.

"I have bad news. Reissner was arrested—yesterday afternoon."

"Reissner, of all people! Do you know whether it's the S.D.?"

Von Oldenbourg shook his head. "I haven't been able to find out who arrested him."

"This must be Ulrich's friends at work," Erickson said. "They've probably checked on my business dealings in the Reich, then picked on Reissner because he is not too important. In case they have to release him with some explanation, there won't be serious repercussions. But he may crack, God pity him. I'd better get out of Germany as fast as possible."

Erickson took a taxi direct to Gestapo Headquarters. After reporting to Baron von Nordhoff, he was again ushered into Himmler's office, to make a personal report.

"You have done a good job, Erickson," Himmler said. "Stay in Berlin

another day or two. I'm giving a little party tomorrow night, that I should like you to attend."

Anxious as Erickson was to get out of Germany at once, he sensed that Himmler would not take kindly to his turning down this signal mark of favour. Or it might be that Himmler knew about Reissner's arrest, and this was just a pretext to keep him here during the poor man's interrogation.

"I shall indeed be honoured to attend," he replied.

"Oh, one more thing, Erickson," Himmler said, rising. "I have a little token I'd like to give you." He pointed to a bust of Adolf Hitler on the conference table.

Erickson thanked Himmler warmly. But as he left the Gestapo Chief's office, his thoughts turned anxiously back to Reissner. Somewhere in Berlin, poor Reissner was staring into the glare of a naked electric bulb, being subjected hour after hour to the same remorseless questions. Anybody might crack under such pressures.

As HE got out of the cab in front of his hotel, Erickson picked out two men stepping out of another taxi down the block—a taxi he had noticed following them from Gestapo Headquarters. So the shadowing was being continued in Berlin.

He sent Prince Carl a business cable, incorporating the prearranged signal for a return wire which would provide an urgent reason for him to rush home: RETURNING IN THREE OR FOUR DAYS. HANDLE THE SCHEDULED LUNCHEON CONFERENCE IN MY PLACE. BUT MAKE NO COMMITMENTS UNTIL I RETURN. ERICKSON. But since all cables had to be passed by the Gestapo, chances were that he would get

Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD	Berlin SS II [redacted] Betreff: [redacted] Ursprung: [redacted] - [redacted]
(11) D	
Beschneidung [redacted]	
Der schwedische Staatsangehörige Herr Eric Erickson begibt sich in Begleitung des Herrn [redacted] zur Ver- nahme dringender gesellschaftlicher Beziehungen, deren un- führung im Interesse des Reiches liegt.	
Herr Erickson ist hier ganz bekannt. Gegen seinen vorübergehenden Aufenthalt in Sperrgebiet bestehen keine sicherheitspolizeilichen Bedenken.	
In Auftrag: [redacted] (1) Obersturmführer	

Pass issued on Himmler's order to Eric Erickson.
Some names censored to protect people still living.

no reply until the following day. As the hours wore on, he paced his hotel room, feeling more and more like a sitting duck. He was tempted to put into effect the O.S.S. plan of last resort: to try to give his shadower the slip and contact a man in Berlin who could get him forged papers and help him make his way out of the country in disguise. But if he took that course, the hunt might soon be on in earnest.

Towards late afternoon there was a knock at the door. Fear welled up inside him. It could not be the cable yet. He opened the door.

"A telegram for you, Herr Erickson." The grey-haired bellboy handed him an envelope. Erickson ripped it open: BAD NEWS. YOUR WIFE VERY ILL. IMPERATIVE YOU RETURN INSTANTLY TO HER BEDSIDE. DR. GUNNAR PETERSON.

Suppressing his delight, he exclaimed in simulated shock: "Oh, my God!" Wonderful Ingrid, he thought: she must have become worried, and sent the wire without waiting for his signal. He immediately rang Von Nordhoff at Gestapo Headquarters and told him the bad news.

"Yes, I know, I'm terribly sorry," Von Nordhoff said. "My office received the wire half an hour ago. I had it sent on at once."

Within less than an hour Erickson was sitting across the desk from Obersturmbannführer von Nordhoff. He had left a note of apology for the Gestapo Chief, and the clearance for his trip home that evening had been arranged. Evidently, Himmler's invitation had had no ulterior motive. His office probably knew nothing of Reissner's arrest. But at this very moment Reissner might be on the point of breaking. And two hours would elapse before the plane was scheduled to take off. . . .

The route the limousine took to Tempelhof Aerodrome cut past piles of rubble that had once been homes. Erickson felt numb and cold. He, too, was scarred, part of his being was broken into rubble. If he got out of Berlin now, perhaps the next time he came the city would be building again. Could he rebuild, too? I'm just tired, he told himself, tired of being afraid.

At the airport Erickson still had more than an hour to wait. He strolled about outside, where it would be difficult for someone to find him. When the Stockholm flight was announced, he made straight for the gate and presented his papers. In a short while he was easing himself into the most attractive pair of arms in creation—the red leather arms of a seat on the four-engined Junker that should take off for Stockholm in exactly six minutes. Erickson prayed silently.

Then the door was slammed shut. The engines started. Slowly the plane began to taxi towards the runway. Then they were clear of the ground. Finally, high up, they levelled off and headed north.

If Reissner should talk while the plane was in flight, the Gestapo might radio the pilot and order him back. Erickson began to chat with the steward, and found occasion to display some of his Gestapo credentials. He mentioned that he'd very much like to watch the flight from up in front. Soon, contrary to regulations, he was settled in the cockpit exchanging stories with the pilot and co-pilot. Each time a radio message came in, he was alert for any sign that it referred to him. And each time it proved to be only a routine transmission. Finally, the lights of Stockholm flashed him a sparkling welcome. Erickson permitted himself the luxury of throwing the city a kiss.

"Feels good to get home, eh?" the pilot said.

"Yes," Erickson said, "it feels good."

As ERICKSON walked down the steps from the plane, he recognized several American Intelligence men mingling with the crowd. His cabled alert to Prince Carl must have led them to take this added precaution. Then he was in Prince Carl's car, with two O.S.S. men following in a car directly behind.

Disregarding her "doctor's orders," Ingrid was up and about when Erickson got home. For one who had just been "very ill," her cheeks displayed a rosininess, her eyes a sparkle, her lips a smile that, Erickson thought, all the Fraus and Fräuleins in the Reich could well envy.

That evening, however, their reunion was to be a brief one. Immediately after dinner Erickson and Prince Carl met the Americans. Erickson was kept busy well into the night dictating and drawing maps. His information about the new, secret jet-plane factory at Berchesgrün was considered particularly valuable by the Intelligence officers.

By the next day his report was on its way to Allied Intelligence in England. His doubts about Reissner's fate and his own current status with the Germans were soon dispelled by Von Oldenbourg, who came to Stockholm on a business trip. He brought good news: Reissner had been released the day after Erickson left Berlin.

"Can we be sure he hasn't talked, that he wasn't set free to lure me back to Germany?" Erickson asked.

Von Oldenbourg shook his head. "Reissner" did not talk. I took the risk of showing him the letter you gave me to convince him that I, too, was associated with you. He swore he had not said a word."

"Was he treated very badly?"

"They did not let him sleep and so on, but no outright torture. And he's received an official apology. 'A case of mistaken identity. We're extremely sorry.'"

Since there had been no repercussions from Schroeder's death, Erickson felt that the danger from that quarter could probably also be discounted. But American Intelligence decided that, unless it became urgently necessary, he would not be asked to make any further trips into Germany.

By this time Erickson was no longer troubled with doubts as to the worth of his mission. Now, in 1944, with the European campaign well under way, Allied oil bombing continued, in Eisenhower's words, to have "great effect not only generally upon the entire war-making power of Germany, but also directly at the front."

There were other important effects too. German synthetic rubber, chemicals and munitions were either manufactured at the same plants as synthetic oil or they required its by-products. Destruction of these plants meant fewer shells and bombs and bullets to use against Allied troops. Many Allied air crews, heading for vital missions, now flew over German anti-aircraft batteries without a single burst being fired at them.

The shortage of aviation fuel also caused heavy casualties in the German Air Force: Göring was forced to cut the training period of his fighter pilots to one quarter of the hours given to British and American pilots. The running-in time for aircraft engines was similarly cut to save fuel. These forced economies led to severe losses of German fighter planes—as many as 1,500 per month—in non-combat flights alone, due to inexperienced pilots and abnormally high engine failures.

Owing to bad weather, Allied bombing of synthetic-oil plants slackened during the autumn of 1944, and by the end of October the German synthetic plants were producing twice as much as in August. That was the very period—October 1944—when Erickson, equipped with top Gestapo clearance papers, was surveying various key synthetic plants.

Shortly after his report reached Allied Intelligence, Allied attacks on oil plants were stepped up. More bombs were dropped on refineries in November than in any previous month. And the British Bomber Command began to play a fuller share in the campaign.

All through the late autumn of 1914, German troops maintained a stubborn resistance on the Western Front. And Hitler continued to hope against hope, and to plan. On December 16, 1914, the Germans counter-attacked. The Battle of the Bulge was bloody and bitter, but within two weeks it became evident that Hitler's generals had been right. As they had warned him, lack of oil and petrol, combined with the riddled state of the railways, had made it impossible to get enough troops, equipment and supplies together for a successful major offensive. And the mechanized divisions at the battle line frequently ran out of fuel and found themselves stranded. By January 8 the Germans had to withdraw. Hitler's last gamble had turned into a Nazi defeat. By now the Russian armies were advancing rapidly across a broad front, and the German oil shortage was making itself felt on the Eastern Front too.

Finally, in these last-stand months of the climactic Battle of the Rhine, the oil shortage forced the Germans to press "Old Dobbin" into service :

The motorized supply columns of all infantry divisions had to be converted entirely to horse-drawn transportation . . . Men and horses moved artillery and ammunition . . . Tanks and armoured vehicles were moved up to the front by oxen. (*U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey*)

Back in 1919, Ambassador Laurence Steinhardt had told Erickson: "You may be able to do a lot more than you think." But neither Steinhardt nor Erickson had anticipated the far-reaching and decisive effects of the military actions to which Erickson's intelligence had contributed.

DURING the last half-year of the European war Erickson and Prince Carl continued to pretend to the Germans that they were working on the refinery project, thus keeping the door open for possible future trips into Germany. But about the middle of February something of a bomb-shell burst in Sweden: a Stockholm newspaper came out with a scathing front-page exposé of the whole refinery project. How had the news leaked out? A quick investigation at the American Embassy turned up the answer: a copy of the purely fictitious memorandum reporting on

"conferences" about the refinery with Swedish financiers and officials was missing. Probably someone who believed it genuine had stolen it in order to expose the "pro-Nazi" businessmen mentioned in it.

Naturally the prominent Swedes who were named knew nothing about the deal and issued indignant denials labelling the memorandum a fraud. But the Swedish public, prevailingly anti-Nazi, placed no great credence in the denials; and considerable scorn was heaped on these men.

After consulting with Allied agents, Erickson wrote a letter, to the newspaper that had published the story, absolving the Swedes named from any involvement. To the Nazis at the German Legation, Erickson explained that he had written his letter in order to take the pressure off those businessmen and officials, but that several of them would secretly still co-operate if the project materialized. Thus he was still keeping the way clear for future visits to Germany, should a turn in the tide of battle make it necessary.

However, the Allied advance continued relentlessly; and on May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally.

Heinrich Himmler, after failing to elude Allied capture, did escape Allied justice by biting on a cyanide capsule. At just about the same time, in Stockholm, Erickson's wife, with Erickson's hearty approval, was smashing into smithereens the bust of Adolf Hitler given them by Himmler. The Chief of the Gestapo died without ever learning how thoroughly he had been taken in by Erickson. But Wilhelm Kortner lived to be arrested and learn the full truth. So did Herr Ulrich. Arrested by the Allies on several charges, Ulrich could hardly have gained much consolation from this belated confirmation of his suspicions.

It was nine o'clock in an evening of the first week in June 1945, a month after the official German surrender.



People in evening dress could be seen hurrying into a prominent Stockholm restaurant.

It was a large party, for all the friends and acquaintances who had spurned Ingrid, Erickson and Prince Carl Bernadotte during the past four years had been invited. When the guests were assembled, an official from the American Embassy rose and addressed the gathering.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced, "I should like to introduce our guests of honour."

Ingrid, Erickson and Prince Carl were now ushered in, to the accompaniment of gasps of surprise. The official then explained Erickson's and Prince Carl's true roles and the invaluable aid they had rendered the Allied war effort.

There was one person in Stockholm who did not have to make his apologies to Erickson that night. This man was Paul Wallenberg, who alone of all Erickson's friends had guessed the truth right from the start.

IN DUE TIME Gerhard von Oldenbourg and all the other Germans who had worked with Erickson were appropriately rewarded by the Allies. And in Hamburg, Klara Holtz learned that the Allies would soon be sending her a substantial payment for her late husband's services, services rendered through a certain "Eric S. Erickson."

Meanwhile, the story of Erickson's true role appeared on the front pages of the Swedish newspapers. And the very week of the party for Prince Carl and the Ericksons, on June 3, 1945, Erickson's relatives in the United States were receiving confirmation of the good news he had already written them. For that morning's *New York Times* carried a story headed: SWEDISH "PRO-NAZI" DUPED FOE 3 YEARS: BLACKLISTED BY U.S., HE SENT ALLIES SECRET DATA ON SYNTHETIC GASOLINE PLANTS.

Prince Carl, too, now emerged in his true light and gained a new-found respect from his family and friends and the predominantly anti-Nazi Swedish public.

As for the Brooklyn-born Eric "Red" Erickson—although he is now in his late sixties—he is still putting over big deals, back in the international oil business. Sweden is still his home, but his beat ranges round the globe. He may still keep a weather eye open when walking down a dark street late at night, but he feels now that, if luck stayed with him all these years, it's probably become an unbreakable habit.



Alexander Klein

ALEXANDER KLEIN was born in Hungary and was taken by his family to the United States as a child. After graduating from college in New York he started on a writing and teaching career. His short stories have been published in *Everybody's* and the *Evening Standard*, as well as in magazines in other European countries, in America, Canada and South America. He has also written film scripts and *The Counterfeit Traitor*, his first full-length work, has been sold to a major film company. During the Second World War he produced a series of operational-training films for the American Navy and Air Force.

Mr. Klein lives in New York City with his wife, and devotes his full time to writing. Apart from his work, his main interest is the North American Indian, about whom, strangely enough, he has so far written nothing, although he has often been the guest of Indian tribes for as long as a month at a time.